GINGRICH'S TAX SCAM—*MICHAEL KINSLEY*

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The Case Against 'Abroad'

The Strange Snobbery of Foreign Affairs Wonks

BY MICHAEL LEWIS

What Deborah Tannen Just Doesn't Understand

The Case Against Consensus

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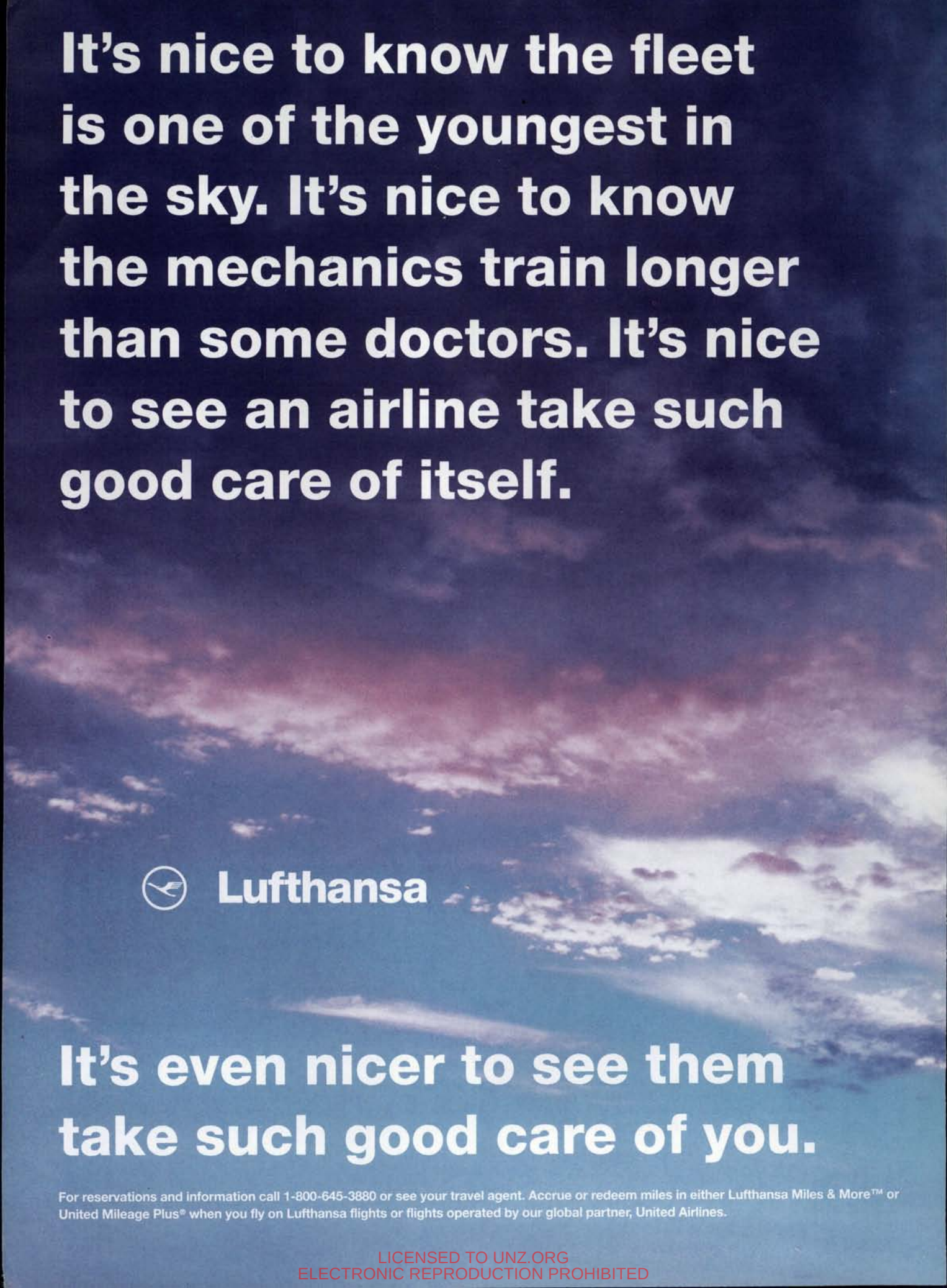
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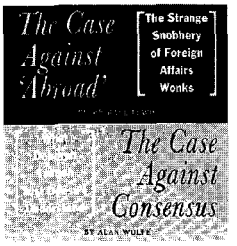

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CORRESPONDENCE

The new Jerusalem

To the editors:
Having just returned from a visit to Jerusalem, I read Martin Gilbert's November 14 article ("Jerusalem: A Tale of One City") with interest. It certainly adds to my knowledge of the ancient and modern events in Jerusalem.

In the final paragraph he writes, "The Jewish and Arab communities ... live virtually separate lives.... Perhaps in this very separation ... may be the best hope for peace." Let me enter a dissent on this point. During my visit, I met with a number of Palestinian and Israeli peace and social change groups committed to developing ways to live and work together. For instance, the Palestinian Center on the Study of Non-Violence maintains regular communications with Israeli groups committed to peace. Its "Dialogue in Action" program involves joint trips for groups of approximately thirty children aged 8 to 15 (fifteen Palestinians and fifteen Israelis) to places of interest throughout Israel. This commitment to communication, mutual understanding and non-violence by all the participants surely is a better path to peace than the "topographical and social" separation Gilbert recommends.

WALTER J. KENDALL III
Chicago, Illinois

To the editors:
Martin Gilbert's otherwise excellent piece on the vagaries of Jerusalem's tortuous history contained a factual misstatement: that churches can be "freely built and freely repaired" at the present time. This assessment overlooks a source of considerable tension in recent years between the Greek Orthodox Church and Israeli officials involving a newly built Orthodox chapel that was bulldozed to the ground in 1992 on the technically correct, yet nonetheless flimsy, grounds that requisite building permits had not been acquired. The televised images of the chapel's needless and unwarranted destruction caused quite a public outrage in Greece at the time—and rightly so. I have no doubt that Israeli rule has been much kinder and gentler to Christian religious freedom in the area than any of the imaginable alternatives, but, as an Orthodox Christian, I cannot see how a bulldozed church building amounts to "unimpeded" Christian worship.

BASILIOS TSINGOS
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:
Martin Gilbert's superb article on Jerusalem mentions the Holy City's indecision over the true site of "Calgary." I suspect he refers to the offered option of either of two "Calvarys." To the best of my knowledge, by common acceptance, there is only one "Calgary." Calgary may be found resting, singular and serene (except for the annual Calgary Stampede), in the Canadian western province of Alberta.

RABBI JORDAN PEARLSON
Toronto, Canada

A normal American

To the editors:
The length of Newt Gingrich's high school paper on the balance of world power continues to grow. In Weston Kosova's article "The Elephant Man" (November 7), it was given as 200 pages—twenty pages longer than reported in David Broder's book *Changing of the Guard*. Actually, Newt wrote about thirty single-spaced pages, and the topic was limited to British, USSR and American naval power—still a pretty impressive volunteer project for a 15-year-old.

By the way, I was Newt Gingrich's high school sophomore English teacher.

NANDO AMABILE
Frederick, Maryland

Olivia Newton-John

To the editors:
David Greenberg chortles at Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray's report that "Ashkenazi Jews of European origin" have higher I.Q.s than other ethnic groups ("Twin Pique," Washington Diarist, November 14). What is ignored is the factor of selective migration. In Eastern Europe, the more aggressive, entrepreneurial and politically minded came here—or went to Palestine, as Zionists. We do not (nor can we ever, given the Holocaust) have a sample of the entire population.

Similarly, there is a selective migration factor regarding the East Asians who have come here. This was true of the overseas Chinese, as against the mainland, and the Indians who went to East Africa, before being expelled by Idi Amin. In fact, it is also clear that blacks who have come here from the Caribbean have contributed a disproportionate number of the leaders of the African American community. In short, since we cannot have complete samples

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RANDOM HOUSE

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of "racial" populations, the findings are spurious. And over time, with all such groups, we have a "regression toward the mean," which tends to equalize the test scores.

ADAM KADMON
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:
As a fellow Jew and TNR fan, I was saddened by David Greenberg's feelings about being Jewish. It was not his sense of pride in the remarked-upon intelligence of "Ashkenazi Jews of European origin" that bothered me. What disheartened me is his embarrassment over Olivia Newton-John's Jewishness. Newton-John was the most successful female pop-star of the 1970s and the second most successful female pop-star of the 1980s. Instead of criticizing an admittedly easy target (granted, "Xanadu" is easy to poke fun at), Greenberg should have realized that as the 1970s get recycled during the 1990s, Newton-John's popularity is bound to soar. John Travolta's return from obscurity in *Pulp Fiction* will rekindle an interest in his earlier classics, including *Grease*, which co-starred Olivia. I guarantee you it won't be long before we hear from the Australian Queen of Pop (who happens to be Jewish). Sadly, Greenberg has missed his chance to be the leader of the bandwagon.

ARIEL DYBNER
New York, New York

Incredible

To the editors:
Mickey Kaus's November 14 TRB "Alice in Chains" did an interesting job of analyzing the Contract with America, the Alice Rivlin memo and the respective parties' reactions to those pronouncements.

The truth is that neither party has any credibility on the deficit issue. The Democrats never cared about the deficit, saying that human welfare came first. The Republicans once did, but I am writing on the thirtieth anniversary of the GOP's most disastrous defeat ever in presidential elections. Since then, the party has been scared to death on the Social Security-Medicare issue, as well as the deficit. Ronald Reagan exploded the deficit and the debt just so he could prove he was not a clone of that "reactionary, callous, heartless" Barry Goldwater.

Sad, but true: Social Security and Medicare enjoy broad public support—there is no majority sentiment for cutting them. Thus, the "conservative" Republicanism of this decade has made itself the party of Nelson Rockefeller, its longtime rival and adversary, on this issue.

WILLIAM R. BROWN
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

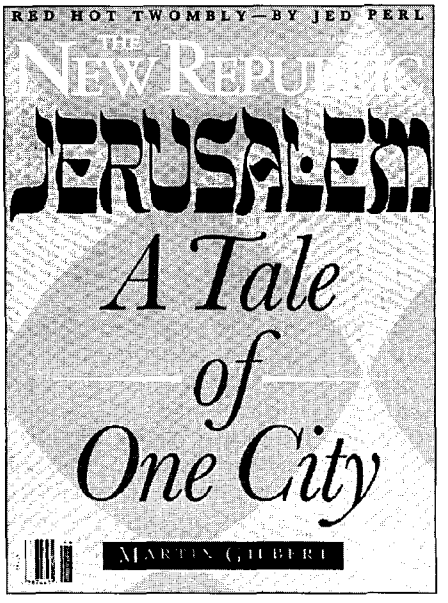
Forget me not

To the editors:
Since you say in your November 14 issue ("Forgotten Ones," The Editors) that "the argument that a higher minimum wage will price the poor out of jobs doesn't wash" because "most minimum wage jobs are not filled by the working poor, but by middle-class teenagers working for pocket money," how will raising the minimum wage help the poor? Just asking.

CHRISTOPHER COLLINS
Arlington, Virginia

Detritus

To the editors:
I am disappointed that Gordon S. Wood ("The Losable Past," November 7) writes



as if the greatest challenge facing historical scholarship is a debate between advocates of objective social science and poststructuralist converts who view the discipline as just the detritus of the modernist project. Wood places Appleby, Hunt and Jacob in the unstable middle position on this continuum—senior historians trained in the old empirical tradition, trying desperately to reconcile it with an anti-foundationalist critique. Most historians I know consider themselves interpreters of the historical record—a record that does indeed exist and does reflect at least its creators' convictions about what they saw around them. Moreover, these convictions had real-world effects; male physicians who were convinced they knew what was "good for women," for instance, largely determined the health care women received. The saddest thing about Wood's critique and the latest turn by these fine female historians is the degree to which they leave intelligent speculation about the past to engage in a debate polarized by two unproductive positions.

JOSELYN ZIVIN
Des Moines, Iowa

French fried

To the editors:
In his review of Gordon Millan's *A Throw of the Dice: The Life of Stéphane Mallarmé* ("Worlds Within Words," November 14), Roger Shattuck was evidently "mal-armé" (ill-armed), *sans Dictionnaire Anglais-Français* when performing his highly imaginative translation of Mallarmé's poet Salut.

While we grant that translation, especially of poetry, aims at the sense of the words and not their literal meanings, Shattuck translates as if he had acquired his skills on Rimbaud's Drunken Boat. To wit: in the third verse, "*Une ivresse* [drunkedness] *belle m'engage* [engages]," for Shattuck becomes, "Tipsy on a tossing deck." From Anthony Hartley's 1965 Penguin Edition translation, the same line means a "fine drunkedness compels me." In the final verse, "*A n'importe* [whatever] *ce qui valut* [worth]," Shattuck translates into, "From sounding at this gay repast," while for Hartley it means "to whatever was worth."

I am at a loss to explain how Shattuck comes up with "gay repast" from "*n'importe . . . valut.*" But I do know that translators are the privileged custodians of an author's thought. If Shattuck's translation gains currency, Mallarmé's thought will be mal-served in English.

Which proves "you can fool some of the people some of the time," but you can't fool us Quebecers. Only our separatist premier, Jacques Parizeau, can do that.

ROBERT J. LEWIS
Longueuil, Canada

When it reigns, it pours

To the editors:
When dealing with the Middle East, a little paranoia may not be a bad idea. Eliot A. Cohen ("Borderline Case," November 7), however, carries it a bit far when he writes that "... a Shiite terrorist, or even the Syrian government, can reign [sic] in Israel by making it clear that independent Israeli military action will [he means *would*] endanger American soldiers."

More than two millennia have passed since Israel last had a king, and he was Jewish. The likelihood of Israelis accepting one today, and Arabic, isn't great.

STUART J. SILVERMAN
Chicago, Illinois

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TRB®

FROM WASHINGTON

Separation anxiety

Am I the only one sympathetic to President Clinton's musings on the school prayer issue? A week after the election, he was asked what he thought about Newt Gingrich's promise to push for a constitutional amendment authorizing "voluntary" school prayer. Clinton said, "I have always thought that the question was when does voluntary prayer really become coercive to people who have different religious views from those who are in the majority.... I'll be glad to discuss it with them. I want to see what the details are. I certainly wouldn't rule it out, it depends on what it says."

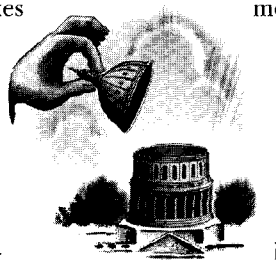
Gingrich no doubt pressed the prayer issue because he suspected Clinton couldn't move far in his direction without triggering near-hysterical attacks from the civil libertarian left. He was right. The editorialists of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* denounced the president within hours. "Mr. Clinton is wrong; the Supreme Court has consistently got this question right," declared the *Times*. Arthur Kropp of People for the American Way called Clinton's answer an "instant cave-in," adding that "you can ... insinuate he is making gestures to the right wing."

Well, yes, that's a fair insinuation. But gestures to the right, when justified, are not inappropriate at the moment. (You would prefer, say, the defensive legalism of Michael Dukakis?) Purely in terms of gorilla-colony theatrics—i.e., who looks weak—Clinton may have been a few degrees too solicitous of Gingrich. But intellectually, Clinton's instinct to start a de-polarized dialogue was sound. The constitutional relation of church and state is not a comfortable one, and the Supreme Court has definitely not "consistently got this question right."

The First Amendment says that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The trouble starts with the second half of this sentence, the Free Exercise clause. It sets up an ideal of tolerance that is noble, and also impossible. The amendment cannot, for example, guarantee the free exercise of religions that don't themselves believe in practicing tolerance. And the first clause of the amendment, the Establishment clause, necessarily frustrates creeds (e.g., Khomeini's Islam) that believe in the unity of church and state.

Justice Antonin Scalia has complained that religion is not a "purely personal avocation that can be indulged ... like pornography, in the privacy of one's room." But the truth is the First Amendment works best with nice, bourgeois religions that can be practiced quietly—if not in the privacy of one's room, then in the privacy of one's church.

Leave the church for public schools and it becomes difficult to guarantee "free exercise" even to familiar Christian creeds. The taxes that support public schools, after all, are not elective. School attendance is mandatory as well. And public schools have to teach *something*. But that something may always contravene one faith or another. Teach evolution, and you violate the conscience of Christian fundamentalists. Teach creationism, and you offend nonbelievers (including me).



In 1987 the Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law requiring the teaching of "creation science" alongside Darwin. The Establishment clause had been violated, Justice William Brennan ruled, because the "purpose that animated" the law was the advancement of a "religious viewpoint." As fundamentalists pointed out, the effect of Brennan's decision wasn't really "tolerance." Only beliefs validated by the tenets of science could be taught, and creationists had to pay taxes to finance the teaching of what they regarded as heresy. Secularism won. But one side had to win. You can't teach everything.

School prayer should be a much easier case. In theory, everybody *can* simultaneously pray (or not pray) to his or her god or gods. Yet here, too, inexplicably, the Free Exercise clause has been sacrificed to the Establishment clause. I'm not talking about the Court's landmark 1962 decision striking down a state-composed "nondenominational" prayer, recited out loud every day in a New York school. Even though students whose parents objected were excused, Justice Hugo Black was surely right in saying the practice constituted government embrace of a quasi-official religion. The Establishment clause was violated, Black noted, even if no students were coerced into praying.

The Court didn't go off the deep end until 1985, when it considered an Alabama law authorizing one minute of daily silence "for meditation or voluntary prayer." What could possibly be wrong with this statute? It requires no one to pray. It establishes no official prayer. It doesn't, on its face, encourage any student to pick a secular or sacred topic for contemplation. Indeed, it seems an entirely reasonable attempt to accommodate the potential desire of students for the free exercise of their religion in schools they are compelled to attend.

Nevertheless, six justices found the law invalid. They noted that the legislator who sponsored it had said that it was an "effort to return voluntary prayer to our public schools." Aha! An illicit religious "purpose"! Even more suspiciously, the law actually mentions the possibility of prayer. And there is always the "indirect coercive pressure" on students to join in.

Now, you can read this decision, as some have, and say the Court has politely left open the possibility that a minute-of-silence law that doesn't mention prayer—and that has a more discreet sponsor—might be upheld. Or you can see it as evidence that the justices, and their doctrinal machinery, are fiercely hostile to virtually any accommodation of the desire to pray. I tend to favor the latter interpretation. Why, after all, should it be fatal that one legislator wanted to "return voluntary prayer" to the schools? Isn't the key issue what the law *does*, not whether any state senators were thinking religious thoughts when voting for it? The judicial fear of coercion, too, seems overstated, sustained by a few lazy references to children's natural conformity. Are kids really coerced into praying simply by the sight of others doing it? Doesn't resisting this pressure teach a valuable lesson in tolerance?

Of course, Newt Gingrich doesn't want silent prayer. He wants vocal prayer. He doesn't merely oppose the Court's 1985 decision. He opposes the 1962 decision. But not all Republicans agree with him. On his right, many fundamentalists dislike the idea of teacher-led (as opposed to student-led) prayers. On his left, Senator Orrin Hatch recently said that only a "silent prayer or reflection amendment" would pass the Senate. Would that be such an unthinkable thing? Clinton wasn't crazy or unprincipled to suggest exploring what a compromise amendment might look like. It really does depend on what it says.

MICKEY KAUS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

DECEMBER 12, 1994

HAMAS 1, PLO 0

"It is worse than the Israelis." "Arafat is worse than Ceauşescu." "Arafat, killer." "The Israeli army didn't act this way." "Arafat must hang." These quotations, culled from the press, seem to reflect popular Palestinian reaction to the violent encounter between PLO police and Hamas militants after Friday prayers in Gaza. Eighteen people died and more than 200 were wounded, a toll larger than any in the intifada. On Saturday Hamas overwhelmed the autonomy regime's forces at a checkpoint near the Jewish settlement of Netzarim; and trouble broke out in two towns on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. This may be the beginning of a Palestinian civil war that has been festering for years.

Of course, each side charges the other with undermining national unity, of which each side also fervently believes it is the sole guarantor. But this conflagration was no great surprise. Hamas was itching for a brawl, and called its people into the street to shed just enough Palestinian blood to turn the mob decisively against Arafat. But Arafat made a choice, too. He could have let the demonstrators do their thing—even throw rocks, their habitual activity. But, schooled in how terror induces consensus, Arafat's men are not used to insolence, and seized the first big provocation as an opportunity to put it down. The score thus far: Hamas, 1; PLO, 0. The Islamic Jihad, even more extreme than Hamas, kept its faithful off the streets on Friday. They hate the Arafat establishment, too. In the overwrought politics of Gaza, then, the odds are not promising for the chairman. The truce with Hamas to which he has assented recognizes these odds: it is a truce initiated by the defeated.

Still, Arafat is a survivor. Alas, for him, survival is becoming still harder. He wants and needs the continued support of the Israelis, without which he will end up with only Jericho and Gaza to show for his handshake on the White House lawn. But the Israelis will demand that he finally get the Palestine National Council to do what he promised fifteen months ago in Washington, that is, to annul those sections of the PLO charter that call for the dismantling of the Jewish state. That the Palestinians find this symbolic act difficult we all know. That they find it *so* difficult is something with which all the peace processors need grapple.

In other words, the PLO cannot have a peace treaty that does not bring peace to the Israelis. But bringing peace to Israel is precisely what Hamas and the Islamic Jihad will not countenance. Ultimately, then, Arafat and his comrades will be forced to choose between losing their partnership with Israel and losing the arbiters of Palestinian politics, the young men in the streets. Right now, of course, the PLO will still attempt to keep both, gesturing one way and then the other. But the rules of the world in which it operates will push the Arafat party into more and more concrete concessions to the Muslim extremists, and these concessions will be paid for in Jewish lives.

It will not be long before Israel is counseled to negotiate with the Islamic militants. But peace processes are not so easy with people who kill as a way of getting to paradise. It is hard for Westerners to understand that compromise is neither the name nor the logic of millenarian desire. Neither is economics. Commenting on the Gaza riot, a spokesperson for the State Department urged "the international donor community ... [to] live up to its commitments and to take steps to fulfill the pledges that have already been made." But the Palestinians outside the Gaza mosque were not demanding investment loans from the World Bank. They were protesting against a regime that had parleyed with the Jews and that wouldn't, they feared, impose exemplary Koranic norms on emergent Palestine. This is a worldview that simply cannot be bought off.

"Bring Rabin back," screamed one of the Gaza "children of the stones," as Arafat used to call them in what were for him simpler days. Of course, the youth did not really want Rabin back. Nobel Prize or not, Rabin is being tested by the events in Gaza. He has counted on the reasonableness of the Palestinians and was reasonable himself. Even after the Tel Aviv bus atrocity he accelerated the devolution of power in the territories to the PLO. If he finds he was wrong, however, as even many Israeli doves are beginning to suspect, the party will end even before it ever really started. •

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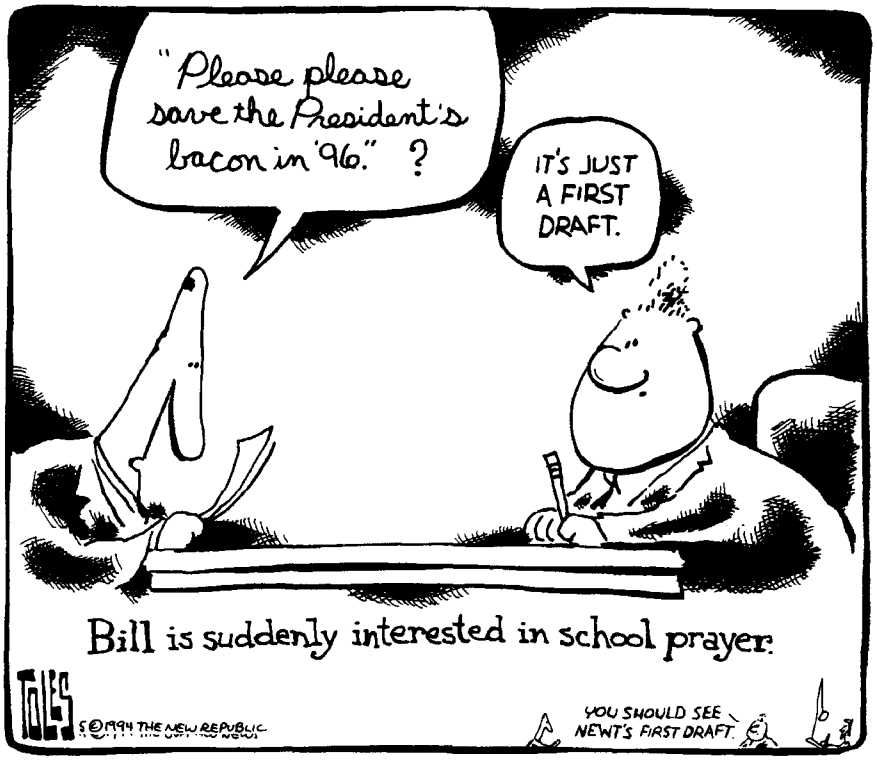
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: Senator Jesse Helms, speaking in North Carolina, said President Clinton "better have a bodyguard" if he visits the state. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the Republican Contract with America, which pledges a balanced budget by 2002, would add around $500 billion to the accumulated deficit by that year. The Missouri government announced plans to spend $18,000 on bus tours of Rush Limbaugh's boyhood home. Tropical Storm Gordon passed through Florida, killing six people. Denver mall managers announced that Santas, some wearing bulletproof vests, will return to city malls after a one-year absence caused by death threats. In Memphis, Tennessee, elementary school teacher Florence Gilliam, 46, and guidance counselor Lagretta Walker, 57, were suspended for fighting at a dance honoring students for good behavior. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the annual consumption of cigarettes declined to 2,493 per person, the lowest since World War II. Texas corrections officials voted unanimously to make all state prisons smoke-free. The General Accounting Office said the sale of land on closed army bases raised $91.6 million, not the $4.1 billion projected by the Pentagon. Lawyers for Jeremy Viceros, 9, told the Idaho Supreme Court that Medicaid should pay for cosmetic surgery to alter his protruding ears, in order to improve his self-esteem. In Las Vegas, the Flying Elvi sued the Flying Elvises for trademark theft. Both organizations leap from airplanes in Elvis Presley (late period) costumes and dance and pretend to sing upon landing. Bill Clinton's horoscope said, "You seem to have been performing a juggling act for so long now that no one could blame you for wanting someone else to take over."


"Please please save the President's bacon in '96." ?
IT'S JUST A FIRST DRAFT.
Bill is suddenly interested in school prayer.
TOLES
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YOU SHOULD SEE NEWT'S FIRST DRAFT.

SLEAZE PATROL: When Debra DeLee, formerly a Washington lobbyist for the National Education Association, was last week named interim chairman of the Democratic National Committee, President Clinton waxed enthusiastic. "Debra has my full support and confidence," he told reporters on November 15. "She has impressed all of us with her good judgment, keen mind and sound political instincts." Those qualities were nowhere in evidence when she tapped Robert L. Watson, who lobbied with her at the NEA, as her chief of staff. Watson was the top aide to Senator Chuck Robb who quit Robb's staff under fire after confessing to distributing the illegally recorded phone conversations of then-governor L. Douglas Wilder in a botched attempt to deflect attention from Robb's personal life. (Watson later pleaded guilty to two criminal charges.) When she accepted the party chairmanship, DeLee vowed "not to dwell on what should have been or what could have been.... Democrats need to roll up their sleeves and get to work." That means cleaning house, not recycling disgraced hacks who typify insider sleaze.

NASTY WELFARE REFORM WATCH: In their new welfare bill, Republicans propose to consolidate Women, Infants and Children, Food Stamps, school lunches and seven other nutrition programs into a single "food assistance block grant." A state could, if it wanted, give this money to public-aid recipients as cash that they could spend however they see fit. Not a bad idea. But don't think the bill is a good-government attempt to reform calcified programs and give the savings to poor people. The Republicans would cut the total food assistance budget by 5 percent and then put a cap on future spending. If funds ran short, the civil servants that Republicans usually vilify could abruptly reduce benefits, cut people off or deny benefits to others. Government checks provide a fairly meager subsistence already, and when recipients can't even predict the size of the next check—or whether it's coming at all—it's just plain callous.

NO ONE HOME: Well, in some cases, Newt Gingrich can be on the right side. Last September, when he was still merely House minority whip, Gingrich wrote a letter to White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta demanding to know why the Food and Drug Admini-

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stration was stalling approval of Johnson and Johnson's Confide, a home HIV testing kit that could vastly increase the number of people who know they are HIV-positive. Panetta immediately sent a memo to FDA Commissioner David Kessler, who then assured Panetta he would expedite approval. Then along came a group of AIDS clinics who have long opposed the kit because they claim it would deprive people of necessary counseling (and them of allotted funding). They FedExed a letter to Kessler accusing Johnson and Johnson of "trying to ramrod the test through the FDA" by paying doctors to tout the product. The FDA, which has blocked approval of the test for seven years, jumped at the chance to launch a procrastinatory investigation. Meanwhile, at least 40 percent of the estimated million Americans infected with HIV don't know it yet.

BOOK WORLD: We're happy to announce the publication of our theater critic Robert Brustein's *Dumbocracy in America: Studies in the Theatre of Guilt, 1987-1994* (Ivan R. Dee). Almost all of its contents appeared in these pages first. We're also pleased to note the appearance of *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies* by Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, published by New Republic Books.

DEPARTMENT OF EXPERTISE:

Women who kill children rare, experts say

—*Waterbury Republican-American*, November 5
(Thanks to John Scully, Cheshire, Connecticut.)

Poorer areas lacking resources, study finds

—*The Boston Globe*, October 24
(Thanks to Michael Fallon, Southborough, Massachusetts.) •

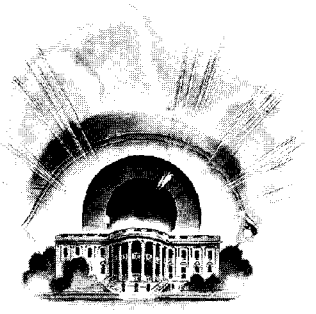
WHITE HOUSE WATCH

SILENT SCREAM

By Fred Barnes

As President Clinton toured Asia in mid-November, aides back at the White House—George Stephanopoulos, domestic policy adviser William Galston, plus lawyers—labored to refine his position on school prayer. They assumed, weeks before Republicans grabbed control of Congress, that Clinton would need to speak with clarity on the subject. They also knew the president was impatient and irritated. "Some of his positions on social issues aren't the traditional [liberal] Democratic positions," a White House official says, "but he hadn't had an opportunity to express himself." Clinton was eager to do so. By the time the president returned from Asia (and a stopover in Hawaii for golf), his aides expected to have their recommendations on school prayer ready for his consideration. Clinton couldn't wait.

His lurch into the school prayer debate, during a press conference in Jakarta on November 15, was classic Clinton. He was ill-prepared, having talked to no one about House Speaker-to-be Newt Gingrich's call for a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer. He was off-message. Foreign affairs and trade were the sole topics he was supposed to discuss. He was desperate to please, aiming to assuage all sides in the school prayer fight. And he figured his gift of gab would pull him through. It didn't. His rambling answer to a reporter's question pleased no one and angered plenty, particularly liberals. His aides were forced to contradict Clinton's assertion that he's open to a constitutional amendment. Why embarrass him that way? Because he's actually opposed to a prayer amendment and always has been. The position they had drafted at Clinton's behest was consistent with what he'd done as Arkansas governor and what he'd said as presidential candidate: he favors a moment of silence, created by statute, not constitutional amendment.



In truth, it's Clinton himself who needs a moment of silence—a prolonged moment. His first press conference spin on the election made him look out of touch. He suggested that the electorate liked the change he'd brought about and voted for more of the same, only delivered faster. Then he realized he'd misrepresented himself and clumsily rushed to associate with the new conservative mood. "He wants to explain," says an adviser gloomily. Leon Panetta, the White House chief of staff, has stressed to Clinton the need for self-discipline. "He understands that but he won't be disciplined," says an exasperated White House official. He won't shut up.

Clinton needs quiet time to get his act together. The two months before the State of the Union address in late January is a perfect period for that. "There's very little role for the president to play," says an aide, "and the public would like a breather from him anyway. It's a good time to get off the stage." Besides, Gingrich is bound to hog media attention in December, when he's officially chosen as Republican leader and House committee assignments are completed, and in early January, when the new Congress convenes. So Clinton is better off not competing with Gingrich in sound

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bites and instead carefully developing his plans, both policy and political, for 1995 and 1996. "He has to give people a sense of where he's going, a sense of direction," says a senior adviser. "If he doesn't [before the State of the Union], he skids off the road." He also needs to cement his political team: a new Democratic national chairman, a re-election campaign manager, fresh troops in top White House political jobs, some new Cabinet members. This, too, should be completed before the State of the Union.

The trouble is, the president and some senior advisers are inclined to move instantly to craft a new Clinton image, exploiting events like trips to Hungary and Haiti and the December summit in Miami with Latin American leaders. That was Clinton's aim—a new Clinton—in blathering about school prayer. By emphasizing the short-run, however, he may not have a political team or a firm agenda in place by January, the latest that full-scale organizing for his re-election campaign should begin. Clinton has dawdled on naming a new Democratic chairman. Bill Daley, the Chicago mayor's brother whom Clinton recruited in 1993 to lead the fight for NAFTA ratification, has strong support, but Clinton can't (or won't) decide. The post is being dangled before many others: Ann Richards, consultant Bob Beckel, Fannie Mae President Jim Johnson, various defeated members of Congress. Likewise, the campaign is nonexistent, though Clinton advisers now regard a challenge in the presidential primaries as more likely than not. Clinton first sought Tony Coelho, the former California representative who advises the White House part time, to run the campaign, but Coelho doesn't want the job. Mickey Kantor, the special trade representative, and Harold Ickes, the deputy White House chief of staff, have been recommended. So has Paul Begala, the partner of James Carville. But, again, the president can't make up his mind.

One thing Clinton doesn't have to decide is whether to be a new or old Democrat. He's both. But he's got to set issue priorities. Does he want to play up welfare reform and the line item veto in the State of the Union, as some advisers argue? What about health care? One fickle White House aide, noticing that health care loomed large in Election Day exit polls, said maybe the president should take up that issue first. Clinton must set priorities in order for the White House to stage a buildup to the State of the Union. This can be done through several weeks of leaks to the press. But the leaks must be "orchestrated," says a Clinton adviser, "which isn't the way they've done it before."

All this puts enormous pressure on Panetta, who's already overworked. When he became chief of staff in June, Panetta acted quickly to harness the "floaters" at the White House, namely Stephanopoulos, Bruce Lindsey and Hillary Rodham Clinton. He put Stephanopoulos under him as a deputy, assigned Lindsey to the counsel's office, and got the First Lady to agree to a less visible role. He also outfoxed Dee Dee Myers after she got Clinton to override Panetta's plan to remove her as press secretary by making himself the chief White House spokesman, appearing on T.V. almost daily. So it was Panetta who fired the first White House volley at Jesse Helms for questioning Clinton's fitness to be commander in chief. But Panetta can't do everything and be everywhere. He didn't join Clinton at the Jakarta summit. He should have. He might have kept Clinton from holding forth on school prayer. As it was, all Panetta could do back in Washington was fume. •

ON THE HILL

HARD KASICH

By Weston Kosova

While Newt Gingrich was testing his powers freely last week, snubbing senior Republicans for committee chairmanships and installing Newtoids in their places, at least one would-be chairman knew his seat was safe: John Kasich. Even before the elections, Gingrich decided he wanted Kasich to lead the Budget Committee if the Republicans won the House. A Gingrich acolyte, Kasich was a natural pick. "Newt looks to Kasich first on budget," says a House Republican staffer. "He trusts his numbers. He doesn't feel like he has to redo the math."

Good thing, since Gingrich is counting on Kasich to pull off some pretty tough calculations. As Budget chairman, Kasich has to figure out a way to pay for the nearly $200 billion in tax cuts in the Republicans' Contract with America. At the same time, he's got to make good on the Republican promise to balance the budget by 2002. And one more thing: according to the contract, he's not even to *think* of laying a finger on Social Security.

How's he going to do it? As far as the Clintonites are concerned, the country would be better off if he didn't try. Since the election, administration officials have launched a series of attacks on the proposed tax cuts. "Extremely dangerous," White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta called the plan. Budget Director Alice Rivlin added that it's "a singularly bad time ... to go with tax cuts without spending cuts."

Kasich waves off the criticism as "unhelpful." It's a typical Kasich formulation: dismissive, in a cutting sort of way. At 42, Kasich is well-versed in the art of the polit-

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ical put-down. He's been a creature of one legislature or another for twenty years. Kasich won his seat in the Republican-friendly Columbus suburbs in 1982, after eight years in the Ohio Senate. His Longworth Building office is decked in party memorabilia: a trumpeting elephant sits atop the thirteen-inch television in the corner. Two other tiny pachyderms inhabit his desktop. On the wall above the couch, Ronald Reagan and George Bush buddy up to the congressman. Indeed, Kasich's psychedelic necktie and hip socks are the only indications that the Reaganite bean-counter is a die-hard Deadhead.

Swiveling and rocking in his chair, Kasich admits a little sheepishly that "at this point in the process," he doesn't really know how to carry out his orders. In fact, he's looking for someone—anyone—who does. "The most important thing that we have to do now is assemble the ideas," he says. "I want people to contact me, or the committee, or Newt, and give their ideas on how to shrink the federal government. If that involves things like e-mail and video and talk radio, we need to invite people to be part of this."

Aside from that, and a few notions of forming "task forces" to study federalism and privatization, Kasich isn't forthcoming with details. "I'm a little uncomfortable about having to be vague," he says. "But I'm being vague for some very legitimate reasons.... Anytime you start to talk publicly about specific things, then all of a sudden you have all these groups beginning to organize, and it doesn't do you any good." He pauses. "We're kind of back to where we were in 1993, when people kept trying to press me to give them all the answers, and I had to keep telling them, 'I'm not prepared to give you the answers, because we don't have it all put together yet.' "

Ninety-three was a big year for Kasich. As the senior Republican on the Budget Committee, he made himself the chief antagonist of Bill Clinton's budgets. When the president unveiled his first effort in February, Republicans denounced it for cutting too little and raising taxes too much. But while Gingrich, Dole and Gramm failed to come up with deeper cuts to contrast with Clinton's, Kasich did. He introduced an alternative budget that promised to cut the deficit by $429 billion over five years—nearly as much as Clinton's—without raising taxes. Gingrich wasn't quick to endorse the plan, which had some touchy provisions (means-testing for Medicare, student aid cuts). But that didn't stop him, and others, from beating Clinton over the head with it.

When the plan went down in the House 295-135, Kasich and Democrat Tim Penny of Minnesota tried unsuccessfully to pass a package of $90 billion in additional cuts. Meanwhile, he joined with Democrats on the Armed Services Committee to rail against dubious defense programs. In 1992 they succeeded in scaling back the B-2 bomber project.

Kasich's willingness to work openly with Democrats "gave him a lot of credibility on our side," says a staffer to a senior Democrat. "He seemed more interested in budget-cutting than just Clinton-bashing." Kasich says he'll bring that same level of scrutiny to the budget this time around. In meeting the requirements of the contract, he says he has one criterion: "We don't want to put anything together that is going to be viewed as intellectually dishonest. I suppose we're going to be open to those charges no matter what we put in there. But it will not be the intention of the Republicans on the committee to put something together that's phony baloney."

Unfortunately, the whiff of lunch meat is already in the air. To get the numbers down, Kasich has begun to hint about adopting something called a "dynamic" model of scoring economic performance, instead of the current "static" model. The difference is big. A static model assumes that you need to cut spending to pay for tax cuts. But under the magic dynamic model, certain tax cuts seemingly pay for themselves by stimulating economic growth. Sound familiar? "Call it smoke and mirrors, call it rosy scenario, call it the magic asterisk. No matter what you call it, it's the same tricks," says Penny, Kasich's former budget-cutting partner.

Penny is convinced that "Kasich doesn't believe in that nonsense. He believes in honest budgeting." Even so, he's not sure Kasich will be able to resist pressure from the GOP leadership to adopt supply-side logic. Kasich's budget-slashing adventures have not left him universally beloved among his Republican colleagues. He draws power from Gingrich's support. "Kasich is a team player. I think it would be hard for him to cross the leadership," Penny says. "I hope they don't put him in a position where he has to sacrifice fiscal responsibility for party loyalty." It may be too late. •

ŠABAC POSTCARD

NOT CRAZY

By Anna Husarska

The trial of the first and so far only defendant charged with war crimes in Serbia opened last week in the small town of Šabac, fifty-five miles west of Belgrade. Serbian liberals—or what's left of them—regard it as a crude diversion from the trials started at the International Court in The Hague. The nationalists see it as a show trial staged for political reasons and aimed unjustly at one of their boys. Both sides are probably right, since the whole thing is one big farce to prove that only drunkards and madmen misbehave in Bosnia.

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The culprit, Duško Vučković, alias Repić, has the looks of an archetypal bad guy. In a photograph published in *Der Spiegel* in 1992 he was overweight, and wore his long blondish hair loose under a khaki cap. Now, in the Šabac prison where he's been held since his arrest in November 1993, the only difference is that he wears a ponytail. Duško, who turned 31 in March, is a heavy drinker, and I mean "heavy drinker"—even by the standards of the Serb voluntary units he was part of. A former metal worker, his war career began in the autumn of 1991 at the Croat-Serb war front in Baranja. At the time, he and his older brother Vojin, a.k.a. Žućo, made a three-month stint as members of the Serb Radical Party, whose leader, Vojislav Seselj, is currently serving a jail sentence for spitting at a fellow parliamentarian.

On April 7, 1992, i.e., one day after the war in Bosnia started—and this is certainly no coincidence—both Vučković brothers were in the Bosnian town of Zvornik, to "help the Serb people defend their territory" as the criminal charge puts it. They formed a voluntary organization, later known as Žuta Osa, which means Yellow Wasp and is the name of a quite good plum brandy. Vojin became the commander; Duško, a member. The *specialité de la maison* of Žuta Osa was ethnic cleansing and looting. Somewhere in the summer of 1992, Žuta Osa attacked the town of Divić near Zvornik (100 percent Muslim) and rounded up the civilians in several places, among them Dom Kulture—the House of Culture, of all places—in Čelopek. According to the charge against Duško, at the end of June 1992, while interrogating an unnamed Muslim in the Dom Kulture, he cut off the Muslim's ear; on June 27 or 28 he shot dead sixteen people and wounded twenty others; the next month, in another village called Radalj, he raped a Muslim woman and robbed her of 1,000 German marks.

I'm not a lawyer, but the charges against Duško (the war crimes charges against his brother have been dropped) are clearly very weak. The date is imprecise, and no victims of the shooting are named (whether dead or wounded). There seem to be no witnesses or at least no one said they saw the killings. No search of bodies was done (Čelopek is now in Serb-occupied Bosnia, i.e., abroad), and the exhibits do not include anything about the Žuta Osa, but plenty about the alleged psychiatric condition of Duško. Jovan Dulović, a journalist from the Belgrade opposition weekly *Vreme* received a letter from Vienna after he published a story about the upcoming trial. The correspondent, Hamo Tahič, said he was a survivor of the Dom Kulture shooting, gave verifiable details and named twenty-eight people who were killed. Dulović published excerpts from that letter but received no inquiries from the prosecutor, Branko Njegovan.

You would think the defense would clean up in such a trial, but then, you probably haven't come across many Serbian lawyers. Duško's attorneys, Dragoljub Djordjević and Zivojin Stefanović, rent two low-ceiling rooms in a seedy Belgrade hotel for their office. When I arrived in the afternoon the place was blue with cigarette smoke, a Black Label Whiskey was opened and the dozen men there all seemed to know each other. Stefanović, a tall man resembling Eduard Shevardnadze, presented himself with the diminutive name Žiko and asked me to take a seat. I felt somewhat uneasy because Serbs in general do not seem to like foreigners, because I said I was a NEW REPUBLIC writer (i.e., from a country that just a week before had lifted the arms embargo on the Bosnians) and because these were, after all, lawyers for a war criminal. After half an hour of uneasy waiting for Djordjević, I left, then returned at 10:00 to find the bottle closer to the bottom and behind the desk a rather handsome 400-pound man with a boyish face, slightly reminding me of Orson Welles in *The Third Man*.

"Our client is a psychopath, but he's not insane," declared Djordjević, who asked me to call him Dragi (meaning "Darling"). Since his English was even worse than my Serbian, I asked him to repeat the sentence in Serbian. Yes, he meant that Duško was perfectly sane. Dragi didn't want to speak about the line of defense but expected that because of the rape accusation the trial would be declared in camera. This would suit the Serb regime: news of the trial happening would be out, but no embarrassing details would be revealed.

"Don't think we identify ourselves with him," said Dragi, letting me a little further into his confidence. After I helped him finish the bottle of whiskey, he told me some fifty people connected with the Serb Radical Party were captured along with the Vučković brothers, but that only Duško had been detained "just in case" he was needed for a fake trial to draw attention away from the real one in The Hague. Of course Duško understood nothing of the political fights between Milošević's and Seselj's parties or the international dimension of his case. Dulović, the *Vreme* journalist, said that "Duško is convinced Serbia has betrayed him and that he will be tried by an unrelenting court of the state whose ethnic cleansing plans he consistently and efficiently implemented. Vučković is understandably confused." But not insane.

The defense lawyers Dragi and Žiko have begun to have more qualms. "Imagine how Serbia will look to the outside world if we prosecute only one war criminal and even he turns out to be crazy," Dragi said the next day as we were driving together with Dulović to Šabac. We were all nursing hangovers, but the atmosphere in the car was extremely merry and Beatles tapes were making us all hum and sing. "Can you imagine guys, here we are about to meet a war criminal and we're listening to The Beatles," said Dragi, turning to Dulović and myself in the back seat. We all had an easy laugh.

When we arrived at the courthouse, Dragi and Žiko went to see Duško, and Dulović and I chatted with the judge, Vladimir Banjić. The judge said he was absolutely not impressed by handling the case of the first war criminal ("a job is a job"), that he sleeps well at night

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and that he sees no reason to question the integrity or sincerity of the charges ("I will work with what I have"). He also said an American journalist asked him whether he was receiving any pressure from Belgrade and that he of course answered that he didn't. When I asked him if he would admit that he was under pressure to an American journalist, he asked me what nationality I was.

On the way back, as we were driving through the rather quaint Serb villages, I saw in them the calm of the as-yet-uncleansed: they looked like what Čelopek, Divić and Radalj must all have looked like before this war. I also had a distinct impression that Dragi and Žiko knew perfectly well that nothing in this trial's outcome depended on their performance. The game was being played fifty-five miles east of Šabac, or perhaps somewhere between the Court in The Hague, the U.N. headquarters and the White House. •

MOGADISHU POSTCARD

SPOILED

By Michael Maren

Acetylene torches tint the night sky on a sandy back street in Mogadishu, less than 200 yards from the fortified United Nations compound. Technicians working for faction leader Mohammed Farah Aidid are mounting heavy caliber machine guns and rocket launchers to the rear ends of Land Cruisers and pickup trucks to use in the next phase of Somalia's civil war. The U.N. barracks, once a base in the hunt for Aidid, now serve to deter any force that might attempt to shut down Aidid's weapons workshop.

Tomorrow, a delegation from the U.N. Security Council will visit. The U.N., it is widely known, will announce its intention to end the Somalia operation by March 31, 1995. Neither Aidid nor his rival, Ali Mahdi Mohammed, seems concerned over the impending departure; both have shrugged off warnings from U.N. Special Representative Victor Gbeho that this is the last chance for negotiations before the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) mission pulls out. Neither seems any more willing to compromise than he was the past five times UNOSOM threatened to withdraw.

Over the past year it has become clear that the Somalis *do not view UNOSOM as a credible mediator, but* rather as a big, dumb cow to be milked. UNOSOM has supplied thousands of jobs in Mogadishu and other towns (every two weeks the U.N. buys up about 20 percent of all the Somali currency in existence). Now, with the departure imminent, the faction leaders are positioning themselves to grab whatever spoils the U.N. leaves behind.

Aidid's side seems to be winning. Last August his soldiers attacked a Zimbabwean contingent in the town of Beled Weyn. One Zimbabwean was killed. The rest were stripped to their underwear. Automatic weapons, mortars and armored personnel carriers valued at more than $2 million were confiscated. (Since the Americans left, the U.N. has lacked the transport capability to reinforce any of its troops in the field.) Aidid apologized for killing the soldier, kept the goods and continued to meet cordially with Gbeho—who continued to express optimism that the U.N. could broker a peace agreement. Meanwhile, Aidid has been complaining about the U.N.'s failure to pay hotel bills that his delegation ran up during months of stalled negotiations in Nairobi and Addis Ababa.

Ever since the American forces left Mogadishu last March, Somalis on the streets predicted that the Egyptians and other Third World troops in Somalia were there only to do business. It appears they were right. Security has collapsed. A few dollars passed to sentries will buy anyone entrance inside the gates of the port and airport to do business. As of last week, fifty-seven brand-new four-wheel-drive vehicles had been sold to Somalis by the security forces for between $3,000 and $5,000 apiece. Some have turned up on the streets of Nairobi—their U.N. markings faintly visible beneath fresh paint—where they fetch $50,000 to $60,000. Recently four tankers filled with gasoline were simply driven out of the port, never to be seen again. Cash and goods alike feed the arms build-up.

When the U.N. finally withdraws, the big prizes will be the port, airport and the U.N. compound itself. Previously, Aidid financed his war against Ali Mahdi by selling off what he had looted in Mogadishu—plumbing, roofing, wires, monuments, office equipment. The war ran down when they ran out of things to steal. Now the U.N. has spent $160 million renovating the former U.S. Embassy compound (which was completed at a cost of almost $40 million by the U.S. government just before Mogadishu descended into chaos). Even after it became clear last summer that the U.N. operation would be ending, the bureaucracy continued to sink money into construction. A new airport terminal building was recently completed. The latest make-work project inside the eighty-acre compound has been to install speed bumps; apparently, driving the same two miles of road day after day had made people reckless. (You can walk across the compound in ten minutes.)

Aidid has insisted to the U.N. that it leave behind vehicles and other valuable equipment, arguing that any "aid" that comes into Somalia should belong to Somalis. Though the request has struck many at the U.N. as impertinent, from the Somali perspective the U.N. operation is inherently corrupt, and U.N. bureaucrats are in

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Somalia only to enrich themselves. They have seen little evidence to dissuade them.

In the past eight months Somalis have seen the U.N. bureaucracy double to nearly 800 civilian personnel, even as humanitarian activity halted. One U.N. worker in the humanitarian office said she was "disgusted" with how little was going on. Most U.N. employees, she complained, were just doing time there to help them climb the U.N. career ladder. "A Somalia combat ribbon looks good on the résumé," she said.

A Somali employee in the same office was more bitter. Having worked under five different foreigners at the humanitarian unit, he said he finally had figured out that the expatriates were interested only in collecting their daily subsistence allowance of $100 or more per day, beyond their salary and perks. Somali employees are lucky to get $300 per month.

The bill for the operation is now $4 million per day—one-third of it supplied by the United States. Most of that pays for foreign troops. Another large chunk has gone to foreign contractors such as the Texas-based Brown & Root or Australia's Morris Catering. Somali businessmen who have tried to deal with the U.N. have complained that procurement officers demand kickbacks. Then there is the $3.9 million in cash that disappeared from the U.N. compound last April. None of the money has shown up, and it is generally considered to have been an inside job.

The price tag might have been worth it if the U.N. were brokering peace, but it's not. The two main factions are further apart than ever, agreeing on almost nothing except that the U.N. special representative is a joke. As negotiations have become more intricate, the U.N. personnel in the country have less experience. No one who was in Somalia last March remains, nor any trace of institutional memory. And although Somali politics can't be mastered in a few weeks, Gbeho seems to be missing even the simple points, further thwarting reconciliation. One of the largest and most powerful factions, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, held a congress in August and elected General Mohammed Abshir Musa as chairman. No one from the U.N. was present, but Gbeho somehow reported back to New York that Abshir's rival, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf, was chosen. The Security Council then published a report acknowledging the chairmanship of Yusuf. The confusion turned out to be catastrophic, since Yusuf belongs to Aidid's camp and Abshir to Ali Mahdi's. Both factions now claim to include the Democratic Front, and neither man can attend a conference where the other is chairman. Now that Yusuf has been anointed by the U.N., he is unlikely to compromise. (Several people from Aidid's side produced copies of the Security Council report from their pockets to show me when I raised the issue.)

Gbeho, who is from Ghana, has another problem not of his making: Somalis in general show little respect for Africans. When speaking English, people around Aidid and Ali Mahdi refer to Gbeho as "that Ghanaian." When speaking Somali they use the word *adon*, which means slave, a term in common use to describe Africans with darker skin and coarser hair. That Gbeho's assistant is also Ghanaian just proves to the conspiracy-minded Somalis that the U.N. is up to no good. The logic runs like this: first the Westerners came in and took their piece of the U.N. loot. Then the Egyptians, Malaysians and other Third World countries got their shot. Now lowly African countries are picking up the crumbs as the operation winds down. The Somali share so far has been small.

For two years foreign optimists have been proclaiming peace at hand in Somalia because the factions were tired of fighting. In truth, they had run out of resources. Now, $4 billion later and with the U.N.'s help, they are rested, rearmed and ready to fight again.

MICHAEL MAREN's book on Somalia will be published by The Free Press next year.

Helms, Newt and GOP foreign policy.

JESSE'S WORLD

By Charles Lane

In questioning Bill Clinton's fitness to be commander in chief, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina was acting like a right-wing politician in one of the Latin American dictatorships for which he has always had an affinity. The provocation by Helms, who will chair the Foreign Relations Committee, has so far failed to spark a military coup in the United States. Nonetheless, it signals a worrying Republican trend. Many Republicans are spoiling to subject the president to the same "micro-management" of foreign policy they used to condemn when Democrats were doing it to Republican presidents. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who will chair the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, says he is ready to challenge the administration's "Russocentric" aid policy toward the new states of the former Soviet Union, and he swears that Congress will never approve a dollar of nuclear-deal aid to North Korea.

The Republican right's foreign policy could best be described as neo-Weinbergerism: a Fortress America that keeps its soldiers home, pinches its foreign aid dollars and retains trade barriers—but bristles with new, expensive weaponry pointed once again, perhaps, toward Russia. The Contract with America, the House Republicans' legislative blueprint, lists "possible" spending cuts including "reform" of the World Bank (i.e., virtual abandonment), less money for the U.N. and $700 million per year in cuts for Russia and Eastern Europe. The contract would restrict the use of U.S.

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troops in U.N. operations and forbid the deployment of U.S. soldiers under foreign command—yet calls for more defense spending, an anti-ballistic missile program and rapid inclusion of the Eastern European countries in NATO. "The Democrats want to spend less on a weak military and send it all over the world," McConnell says. "We want a stronger military used more selectively."

Still, Helms isn't the only player in Republican foreign policy, and his neo-isolationism has yet to win the argument in Republican ranks. On the use of force abroad, the Republicans are no more consistent than the Democrats. While they were mostly unified in opposing intervention in Haiti, on Bosnia they've splintered. Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich and Ben Gilman, the next chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, have called for tougher action against the Serbs, including American-led bombing and lifting the arms embargo. Senator John McCain of Arizona, in contrast, opposes such policies—but has championed the strongest part of the Republicans' foreign policy, a harder line on North Korea, even at the risk of war.

Next to Helms on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee sit such stalwart internationalists as Richard Lugar of Indiana and Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas. The administration knows this. "Helms will mau-mau us on appointments and foreign aid," says a senior administration official. "But on the core issues—NATO, Russia and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe—we can't compromise. Lugar and the moderates will work with the Democrats." Constant fencing with Helms may even force the Clintonites to sharpen their case for internationalism, which would not be hard.

Moreover, the rise of Republican nationalism has landed Dole in a sticky position: he supports GATT but fears the right in the 1996 presidential primaries. Gingrich, too, may stray from the Contract with America on foreign policy. Before the election, he predicted that the coming Haiti invasion would be a "disaster." But just a few weeks earlier, he'd sounded like a White House spin controller. "On the Middle East they have had very good results," he said. "Christopher has been very good. And the policy toward Boris Yeltsin has had the result that Russia today is decidedly safer and more democratic than it has ever been. They get no credit for their successes."

Gingrich is on good terms with national security adviser Anthony Lake, who appreciates the way Gingrich rounded up Republican votes for aid to Russia. Bringing democracy and free markets to a big former Communist country strikes a chord with the avatar of the conservative opportunity society. Gingrich has even advocated sending thousands of American technical trainers to Russia and bringing a like number of Russians to the United States. Gingrich was starry-eyed at what he saw on a trip to the former Soviet Union in April. One of his constituents wrote to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* to complain about a Cobb County town meeting at which Gingrich sang the praises of Harvard MBAs from the World Bank helping Russians switch to capitalism. Even McConnell says he is not against aid to the former Soviet Union per se. He just wants more of it to go to republics other than Russia, a position toward which the administration itself has been tending of late. Hence those "possible" cuts in aid to Russia may be overblown.

Republican support for a bigger NATO is something of a reversal for them—one reason Clinton adopted the amorphous Partnership for Peace last year was the lack of GOP support for something stronger—and is harder to square with a friendly posture toward Russia. But the administration faced this dilemma even before the election, and began to move away from the partnership and to accelerate NATO's eastward expansion. Besides, the Republicans' contract doesn't seek to impose a fixed date for including Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; the president would only have to report on the progress toward their inclusion in NATO.

Then there's the Republican fixation on U.S. military participation in U.N. operations—a key issue for the increasingly Republican voting bloc of military personnel. Caspar Weinberger's 1984 speech imposing strict conditions on the use of force was a reaction to America's debacle in Lebanon. The current Republican neo-Weinbergerism is a reaction to the deaths of eighteen Americans in the hunt for Mohammed Farah Aidid in Somalia. Gingrich was apoplectic when Vice President Al Gore eulogized the Americans killed by friendly fire over Iraq "in the service of the United Nations."

But what the Contract with America advertises as a ban on foreign command of American troops is more toothless than the Boland Amendment's contra aid ban. Clinton can waive it simply by certifying that he is acting in our vital national security interest—an elastic concept if there ever was one. And in fact, the administration, also chastened by Somalia, has already been moving toward a less exuberant stand on U.N. peacekeeping operations. The contract calls for a U.N. inspector general to monitor the use of peacekeeping funds; so does a May 8 administration policy paper. The administration itself wants to reduce the amount of money the United States contributes to the U.N. peacekeeping budget (after a year in which the Democratic Congress gave it $200 million less than it requested to fund peacekeeping). The administration has promised to ensure that peace operations have clear objectives and a foreseeable "end point."

Dole and Gingrich find themselves torn between their own free trade, internationalist instincts and the nationalist demons they unleashed and exploited for Republican victories in the last election. Clinton, for his part, was elected on a pledge to focus on domestic renewal, but now seeks to salvage his presidency by making use of the White House's authority in foreign policy. They all need each other—as shown by their efforts to forge a GATT compromise so Dole can push it through the Senate without alienating the GOP faithful. In the latest irony of his administration, Clinton has to rescue his presidency and foreign policy by joining in the fight for the soul of the Republican Party. •

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Capital gains (sigh) again.

THE GOP'S TAX SCAM

By Michael Kinsley

One moral test of any conservative economic policy is whether it is pro-capitalist or merely pro-business. Does it actually serve free-market values, or only the interests of those who happen to be on top? A policy that increases economic inequality—either by rewarding the rich or burdening the poor—is not automatically disqualified for that reason alone. But if a regressive policy is going to be justified on the theory that "a rising tide lifts all boats," it had better lead to that rising tide.

Cutting the capital gains tax has been a Republican obsession for almost two decades. Almost incredibly, this turns out to be their first priority for use of their new muscle in Congress—ahead of any government spending cut, ahead of any tax cut for the middle class. Last week the incoming majority leader, Bob Dole, threatened to hold the GATT trade agreement—a primarily *Republican* project!—hostage to a capital gains tax reduction. There is no better illustration of devotion to the "haves" masquerading as a concern about economic growth.

The proper standard for believers in the free market is that the tax code should affect economic decisions as little as possible. This means that tax rates should be as low as possible, of course. But, given that tax rates cannot be zero, it also means that tax rates should be as similar as possible on the different economic alternatives people face. The technical term for this principle is *neutrality*. It applies to both labor and capital. If the income of butchers is taxed more heavily than the income of bakers, this is not merely unfair. It is also inefficient: there will be fewer butchers and more bakers than the "invisible hand" alone would dictate. Likewise, if capital gains are taxed at a lower rate than, say, dividends or interest, people will arrange their affairs to have more of their investment profits in the form of capital gains and less of it in the form of dividends and interest.

You might well say that is a good thing: capital gains represent risk-taking long-term investment that the government ought to encourage. But if you say that, you can no longer claim the banner of the free market. You have become a central planner, an advocate of "industrial policy," a socialist. You are saying that the market cannot be trusted, that the government knows better than the invisible hand where the nation's investment dollars ought to go. Furthermore, if you say that—at least as regards capital gains—you would be wrong. There is nothing metaphysically unique or morally superior about a "capital gain" as opposed to any other form of investment profit. Lawyers and accountants are adept at turning one form into another. At best, preferential treatment for something called "capital gains" leads to overinvestment in some areas and underinvestment in others. At worst, it leads to "shelters": investments that make no economic sense except for the tax angle.

The tax treatment of capital gains already violates the principle of neutrality. Capital gains are favored in three ways. First, increases in the value of capital assets (stocks, bonds, real estate, gold coins, etc.) are taxed only when the profits are "realized" through sale of the asset. Interest, by contrast, is taxed every year—even if it is left untouched in the account. Bill Gates has seen his net worth increase from near zero to more than $9 billion, but since most of that reflects the increase in value of his stock in Microsoft, he has never paid tax on more than a small fraction of it. This deferral of taxation has the same value as an interest-free loan.

Second, the tax bill on most capital gains of wealthy people is not merely deferred. It is wiped out by what is known as the "angel of death loophole." The profit on inherited assets is measured from the time the asset was inherited. Any profits that were "unrealized" at the time the previous owner died are never taxed. This is an annual loss to the Treasury of some $5 billion.

Third, when the 1993 budget bill raised the top tax rate to an effective 39 percent, it left the ceiling on capital gains at the previous top rate of 28 percent. This means there is already an eleven-point gap between the top tax rate on realized capital gains and on other forms of income.

(A fourth category of capital gains favoritism applies only to houses. People who sell a principal residence and buy another are allowed to "roll over" their profit without paying a capital gains tax. And after age 55 there is a one-time-only $125,000 exclusion for profits on the sale of your principal residence. These two provisions mean that almost no one ever pays a capital gains tax on the sale of the house they live in.)

To these various existing tax breaks for capital gains, the Republicans propose to add two more. First, an outright tax exclusion for half of all capital gains. Second, inflation indexing, so that the tax would only apply to real profits, not to phantom profits caused by inflation. (Example: You bought some stock for $1,000 and sold it for $5,000, but during that time prices doubled. Since the $1,000 you paid is now the equivalent of $2,000, your profit would be measured for tax purposes as only $3,000, not $4,000.) The 50 percent exclusion would make the top tax rate on capital gains about 19 percent. This would hit at incomes of about $250,000 per year. By contrast the very *lowest* marginal tax rate on wage income, including the Social Security levy (from which capital gains are exempt) is about 23 percent. And if

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you include the employer's half of Social Security (which most economists agree is actually paid by the employee in the form of lower wages), the lowest tax rate on wage income is more than 30 percent. That hits at incomes under $20,000 per year.

So, if the Republicans get their way, the richest people in the country will pay *at most* a lower tax rate on their capital gains than the lowest tax rate unskilled workers pay on their wage income. Is that fair? Is that reasonable? Can any theory of "incentives" justify such a bald disparity?

The adjustment of capital gains for inflation does sound fair and reasonable—at first. But factoring inflation into the tax code is more complicated than it seems. Surely, if you are going to adjust capital gains for inflation, you should do the same for interest. If I'm earning 8 percent interest at a time of 3 percent inflation, my effective profit is only 5 percent, not 8 percent. More pertinent, what if I'm *borrowing* money at 8 percent, and inflation is running at 3 percent? Under current rules, if my borrowing is for business purposes, I can deduct the whole 8 percent—even though my borrowing cost is just 5 percent in real terms. (The other 3 percent is making up for the effect of inflation on the lender's principal.)

To index capital gains, but not interest payments, for the effects of inflation would not merely be unfair—it also would be wildly inefficient. It would become profitable to borrow money for investments that make no economic sense, simply because all of the nominal borrowing costs would be deductible while only part of the nominal profit would be subject to tax. The result would be an outbreak of wasteful new tax shelters.

Be prepared for a lot of obfuscation in the coming debate about the cost of these new capital gains breaks. The congressional Joint Tax Committee estimated in October that they will cost the Treasury upward of $25 billion per year, once they've been on the books for a few years. But Republicans insist that this is "static" analysis. They prefer "dynamic" analysis, which shows that a capital gains break pays for itself or actually brings in revenue.

The labeling is seductive. Asked to choose between something "static" and something "dynamic," most people will naturally be inclined to opt for dynamism over stasis. What the dread "static analysis" reflects, though, is the sound—one would have thought, conservative—principle that you shouldn't count your chickens before they're hatched. What the glamorous "dynamic analysis" amounts to is the assumption that an explosion of new economic activity, and thus new tax revenues, will automatically result from a tax cut. Such assumptions are rightly suspect. They have proved wrong before.

The effects of changes in capital gains tax rates are especially hard to measure. Claims that economic activity and tax revenues have gone up or will go up from a capital gains cut need to be treated skeptically for two reasons in particular. First, favorable treatment of capital gains causes people to take their profits in the form of capital gains. This leads to more tax revenue from capital gains, but less from other categories of income. Suppose the tax laws gave a 50 percent break to people named "Newt." Sure, revenues from people named "Newt" would go up. But the reason would not be that people named "Newt" were working more than twice as hard. The reason would be that many folks would change their names to "Newt." Total tax revenues—including revenues from people with less euphonious names— would go down.

Second, a lowered capital gains rate will lead some people to sell investments they would otherwise hang onto for longer. This is known as the "unlocking" effect. But an investment can only be cashed in once. So more tax revenue now from the unlocking effect means less revenue later. Those "dynamic" analyses usually extend five years, capturing the up side of unlocking but not the down side. Furthermore, most "unlocked" investments are old investments—that is, they predate the tax cut and therefore obviously were not caused by it. Only the cashing in—not the investment itself—can be credited to the tax cut. And the unlocking effect does not really release capital for "new" investment—as is often suggested—since (obviously) every capital asset sold by one person is bought by another, who must supply exactly as much money as the seller receives. The net change in the total pool of capital available for other investments is nil.

To be sure, unlocking is good for the economy in a subtler way. It greases the wheels. The less people worry about taxes in deciding when to buy and sell assets, the more attuned they will become to real economic signals. They will trade more readily, and economic efficiency will improve. One likely effect of lower capital gains tax rates is that "old" assets will decline in value relative to "new" ones (since sellers will be less reluctant to cash in the old ones). In that sense, unlocking will indeed make new investment more appealing. But this limited, third-order effect can hardly support all the rhetoric about what an economic stimulus a capital gains tax cut would be. Furthermore, a better way to unlock capital gains, if that is your goal, would be to close the "angel of death" loophole. The tax due on accumulated capital gains should be collected at the time inherited assets are passed along. There would be less incentive to hold assets indefinitely without trading them if it were inevitable that accumulated profits would be taxed at least once a generation in any event.

An eccentric by-way of the capital gains debate is the question of capital losses. Under current rules, you can deduct your losses against your gains in any year. You also can deduct up to $3,000 of capital losses each year against other forms of income. And if your losses exceed your gains by more than $3,000 in any year, you can carry forward the excess loss and deduct it in future years. What you cannot do is use more than $3,000 of capital losses in any one year to reduce the

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tax you owe on non-capital income.

Among capital-gains aficionados, this is regarded as monstrously unfair. *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page frequently sermonizes about the plight of those with excess capital losses. But why? The *Journal* is not ordinarily so solicitous of economic losers. The explanation is that genuine losers are not the only ones who would have more than $3,000 of capital losses to report on their tax forms year after year, if the law allowed it. So would successful people who arrange their affairs cleverly, to cash in their losses and hold onto their gains. Much worse, eliminating the capital loss limitation would invite an explosion of tax shelters. The basic tax shelter trick is to create a set of transactions that produce mirror-image gains and losses. You take the losses, put off the gains, and thereby "shelter" unrelated income from taxes. The result would not just be the loss of billions in tax revenue. It would also be vast new inefficiencies and perverse incentives in the economy, and a vast waste of national brainpower on economically meaningless transactions.

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* November 21, Harvard economist Martin Feldstein unintentionally confirms this point in an attempt to prove the opposite. In an article titled, "Why the Capital Gains Tax is Unfair," Feldstein argues that if capital gains were indexed for inflation, and capital losses were deductible without limit, "gains and losses would balance, and the Treasury would collect essentially no revenue from the capital gains tax." Therefore, he says, the tax might as well be abolished. But Feldstein surely does not believe that capital gains themselves would disappear in the situation he outlines. Indeed, he (and the editors of the *Journal*) surely believes that the economy would be a lush Eden of capital gains under such advantageous tax arrangements. Only capital gains *tax revenue* would disappear.

The capital gains debate is encrusted with myths, many of which are sure to reappear in the coming weeks. It is *not* true that President Kennedy cut the capital gains tax, setting off the 1960s boom. Kennedy *proposed* a small cut in the top capital gains rate, along with other changes (such as closing the "angel of death" loophole) that overall would have *raised* the capital gains tax burden. In any event, none of the proposed changes ever occurred. It is also not true that the capital gains tax is much lower in Japan. There is an alternative tax of 1 percent of the gross sales price for shares traded on public exchanges. But for other assets—private company stocks, real estate, etc.—the tax rate routinely ranges over 50 percent (as it does on other forms of income).

The Cambridge economist Joan Robinson is supposed to have said that the purpose of studying economics is to avoid being fooled by economists. This is especially true in the arcane field of capital gains where, for the most part, only those who stand to benefit (and their apologists) have mastered the details. Be prepared. •

COURT WATCH

COMING TO TERMS

By Jeffrey Rosen

At the end of October a huge red, white and blue envelope from a group called U.S. Term Limits arrived in the mail. "Fellow American," it began, "most members of Congress view their job as GUARANTEED FOR LIFE. The average rate for incumbent congressmen over the last decade has been almost 98 percent. WHY? Because it is almost impossible for a challenger to come anywhere near matching an incumbent's campaign war chest!... TERM LIMITS IS THE GREATEST MOVEMENT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY!"

That was last month. But the Supreme Court ignores the election returns; and on November 29, the justices will hear arguments in *U.S. Term Limits* v. *Thornton*, which asks them to decide whether the federal term-limits initiatives that twenty-two states have passed since 1992 are consistent with the U.S. Constitution. (Nine of the initiatives were passed this year.) There's a faintly academic quality to the argument, since the speaker-designate of the House of Representatives has rashly promised to propose a term-limits amendment to the U.S. Constitution within the first 100 days of his regime. Nevertheless, if the justices strike down the state initiatives, as every other federal court has done, the clamor for a constitutional amendment will be hard to resist.

The standard legal argument against state term-limits initiatives is a wooden syllogism: the Constitution specifies three qualifications for membership in Congress: age, U.S. citizenship and residence in the relevant state. In 1969 the Supreme Court concluded that Congress could not refuse to seat Adam Clayton Powell because the Framers of the Constitution thought Congress had no power to alter the list of qualifications. Therefore, state term-limits initiatives are unconstitutional because they expand the list of qualifications beyond the constitutional floor.

Stated this mechanically, the argument begs all the relevant questions. The central concern of the *Powell* decision was the danger that Congress might entrench itself by manipulating its own membership requirements. But this casts no light on the validity of term-limits amendments to state constitutions, since they've been ratified, since the progressive era at least, not by ordinary legislators, but by the people themselves. So the real question is a heady matter of democratic theory: Are state term-limits amendments, ratified by

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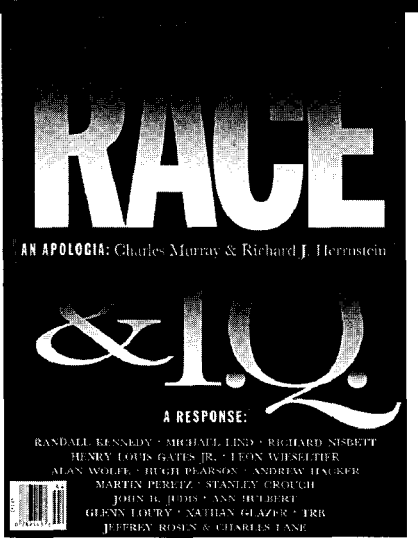
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the people, an expression of popular sovereignty in its purest form? ("Due to an acute outbreak of democracy," says the answering machine at U.S. Term Limits, "all of our lines are busy.") Or are term-limits amendments, in fact, *anti*-democratic because they limit the choices of voters in particular elections?

The best case for term limits as the apotheosis of plebiscitary democracy appears in a brief filed by Roderick Hills of the University of Michigan. The people of Arkansas, argues Hills, are authorized to enact term limits by Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, which says that "the House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States" and by the Seventeenth Amendment, which provides for the popular election of U.S. senators. The Arkansas plebiscite on term limits, which the people are free to repeal whenever they like, was itself a popular election in which the voters decided that they no longer wanted to be represented by long-standing incumbents.

But Hills's argument falters when it comes to defining "the people." Term-limits amendments are ratified by a majority of voters across the entire state. But federal law requires congressional elections to be held in single-member districts. Therefore, it's conceivable that the majority of voters in an Arkansas congressional district may be yearning to re-elect a trusted incumbent, only to find their hands tied by a term-limits amendment that they themselves opposed. Elections for the Senate, by contrast, are statewide, so perhaps term limits are constitutional for the Senate but not for the House.

Once you concede that state term-limits amendments can frustrate the wishes of local majorities, it's easier to trot out the *Federalist Papers* on the importance of popular sovereignty. ("The true principle of a republic is that the people should choose whom they please to govern them," and so forth.) The only way of recasting term limits as a boon for democracy is to resort to esoteric arguments about how people aren't *really* free to vote against incumbents, because of the corresponding loss of pork for their districts. But these arguments—which the briefs discuss as classic "prisoner's dilemmas" and which Dan Rostenkowski cast in less academic terms during his last campaign—are especially unconvincing since the voters ignored them on November 8.

The justices will be on solid ground if they strike down term limits on the theory that no temporary majority—in a federal or state legislature or state plebiscite—should be able to add qualifications for office that thwart the will of the voters in each district. So the only hope of persuading the Court to uphold term limits is to argue that they aren't formal disqualifications after all, because they don't always work. Robert Bork, for example, has filed a quirky brief arguing that term-limits amendments don't actually impose term limits; they're "merely" procedural restrictions that prohibit incumbents from appearing on the ballot, but leave them the faint hope of being re-elected by write-in votes.

Although this argument has the virtue of perversity, it is hard to reconcile with the preamble to the Arkansas amendment, which says cheerfully that "the people of Arkansas, exercising their reserved powers, herein limit the terms of elected officials." Since the explicit purpose, and almost certain effect, of term-limits amendments is to prevent incumbents from winning elections (some states don't even have a write-in option), recasting them as "mere" procedural regulations would be a triumph of form over substance. And even if the more formalist justices, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, are inclined to accept Bork's argument, they'll still have to confront the claim that keeping incumbents off the ballot violates the First Amendment rights of political parties to nominate whomever they choose.

Finally, there's the argument that term limits are a valid regulation of the "manner" of elections under the elections clause of the Constitution, which says that the "Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations." But this theory would give Congress ultimate control over the tenure of its members, even though the Framers specifically deprived Congress of that power.

All this suggests that we can look forward to a rare glimpse of the justices' muscles if the Court rouses itself to strike down most of the state term-limits provisions before June. The new speaker, then, will be obliged to fulfill his Contract with America by shepherding a federal term-limits amendment through Congress; and whatever Congress proposes, the state legislatures will enthusiastically approve. It seems likely that the federal term-limits amendment—like the Seventeenth Amendment, requiring popular election of the Senate, and the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote—will be swept into the Constitution on a wave of populist indignation that began with initiatives in the states.

There is, however, an important difference. The Seventeenth and Nineteenth Amendments broadened the suffrage and increased the choices of local majorities. A national term-limits amendment would do the opposite. If the new speaker is determined to amend the Constitution, why not give states the option of adopting term limits, rather than imposing them across the board? (Something like "the people of the several states hereby have the power to impose limits on their representatives' tenure in office" would do the trick.) The current of popular favor could then run pure, and all fifty laboratories of democracy could accept or reject term limits as they pleased. For newly elected Republicans whose views have evolved over the past few weeks, an optional amendment is their only hope. •

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THE CASE AGAINST 'ABROAD'

By Michael Lewis

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> —Advertisement in *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1993

I think I can pinpoint the moment I first felt obliged to be interested in foreign affairs. It was during a steamy New Orleans summer between high school and college, when, after a local worthy ridiculed me for never having heard of Rebecca West, I found myself bench-pressing a copy of *Black Lamb and Gray Falcon*, the author's 1,200-page study of Yugoslavia. The map at the front immediately confirmed my suspicion that Yugoslavia lay somewhere between England and China. I read on, with a growing self-esteem, until I arrived at page 2. There I encountered the marvelous passage that has haunted me ever since, in which the author describes herself lying in a London hospital bed in June 1914, and hearing the news on the radio that the Archduke Ferdinand had been shot in Sarajevo by a Bosnian terrorist:

> I rang for my nurse, and when she came I cried to her, "Switch on the telephone! I must speak to my husband at once. A most terrible thing has happened. The King of Yugoslavia has been assassinated." "Oh dear!" she replied. "Did you know him?" "No," I said. "Then why," she asked, "do you think it's so terrible?"
>
> Her question made me remember that the word "idiot" comes from a Greek root meaning private person. Idiocy is the female defect: intent on their private lives, women follow their fate through a darkness deep as that cast by malformed cells in the brain.

I doubted many others who read this passage identified with the nurse. The prejudice against the provincial outlook rarely has been so lethally put, and it proved too much for ordinary adolescent defenses. Out went seventeen happy years lived in ignorance of Yugoslavia, archdukes and other places and characters remote to my experience. In came a strained interest in global affairs, inspired by a terror of a life of idiocy. News from abroad became the homework of real life. The West Bank ceased to be the other side of the Mississippi River Bridge; the Jordan river was no longer the place just across the state line where people went to fish and water ski. It was not a pretty sight, this intellectual awakening. It was hardly a substitute for a passionate curiosity about, say, the politics of sub-Saharan Africa. But there it was.

I mention this experience in part because I imagine that a lot of people reared in obscurity trace their interest in foreign affairs to a fear of being thought idiots by sophisticates. But it also provides a counterpoint to a more recent encounter with another book published the same year—1941—as *Black Lamb and Gray Falcon*, the memoir of William Alexander Percy, called *Lanterns on the Levee*. Percy also recalls June 1914, which he spent climbing Mount Etna with a pair of drunken Sicilians:

> He [one of the sozzled Sicilians] said they were scared this time because ours was the first ascent anybody had made since the last eruption. He added that the last person he had guided to the top was an Austrian grand duke. I was not interested in Austrian grand dukes and wished he would shut up. He continued that in yesterday's paper he noticed the grand duke had just been assassinated at Sarajevo; one duke more or less—what time did we start up the crater for the sunrise?

Of course this is partly an author's joke on himself, but only partly. The rest of the memoir is much of the same: a tale of an important life lived rooted wherever the author happened to be, usually Greenville, Mississippi. Percy was a planter, poet and lawyer, the son of a U.S. senator, the uncle and up-bringer of the novelist Walker Percy (who said of him that "he was the most extraordinary man I have ever known") and a hero in the war that followed the archduke's murder. And yet his attitude toward world history, at least in his memoir, remains rather passive. He knows it is important but he cannot do much about it and so he will simply take it as it comes.

This willful anti-worldliness is poles apart from the fashionable omniscience of the intellectual, and was no doubt something of a pose. But that's almost the point. It is nearly impossible today to imagine even the average big-businessman, much less an artist and thinker of Percy's stature, striking a similar pose. The global perspective is in: when an archduke bites the dust, if you are a certain kind of important person, you want to be the first to grasp the global ramifications. When Sir James Goldsmith, the corporate raider, retires to write a book, its subject is a foregone conclusion. A recent full-page ad in *The New York Times* explains that the author "brings his challenging perspective" to, among other global issues, "the true effects of global free trade and GATT"; "why the new world order proposed by the West is deeply flawed"; and "why, despite our extraordinary economic success, we have destabilized our society to a deeply dangerous extent." (He should know.)

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You can always see current fashion best in whatever it is that young ambitious people are aping. Coming out of college in the early 1980s, I remember, you would ask some lucky person who had gotten admitted to the Harvard Business School or the Harvard Law School what he or she intended to do afterward, and invariably he or she would reply, "international finance," or "international law." I'm now almost sure that no college student really knew what was meant by international finance, and there wasn't any international law that mattered. (I don't think these people had the sea lanes in mind.)

What appealed was the notion of "international." This collegiate internationalism was not the romantic, Byronic lust for foreign adventure—though there was some of that in the air, too—but the anti-romantic quest for importance. To be suspended between nations sounded portentous. The trick was to remain forever uprooted; to go home was an admission of failure. (Nevertheless, home clearly remained the reference point; people left it to see distant things, no doubt, but also to be seen from a distance.)

It turned out that the attitudes of those of us in college mirrored fairly well the attitudes of our most ambitious elders. About the only high status role left in an American commercial bank, for instance, was overseas, lending money to Third World countries that could never repay. The most sought-after jobs at national newspapers were in foreign bureaus. This is still true. The farther away the news, the more prestigious it is to gather. Imagine! Some of the most talented reporters at *The Washington Post*, positioned at home to observe and influence the world's most powerful nation, want more than anything to be sent to Tokyo or Moscow, where they will be at once, strangely, more marginal and more important.

At the very top of the food chain one sees a lot more of the same. Call it the prestige of distance. However irrelevant the modern ambassador, for example, very important people still fall over each other to become one, and thus consign themselves to a future of stilted dinner parties and lost passports. And at a time when anyone with eyes can see world-class problems inside America, the favored meeting place of serious American problem-solvers is still something called the Council on Foreign Relations. Not "of" but "*on*." What does it say that the quickest way for the man of affairs to establish that he is a Thinker is to publish an article in the council's magazine, *Foreign Affairs*? It says that people whose minds are occupied by things far away are considered more profound than people whose minds are occupied by things close at hand. One subject alone, albeit broadly defined, is deemed worthy of the professional important person. The world!

But it is an odd world, forever on the brink of some crisis, upheaval, beginning or ending, all full of bangs with nary a whimper. Open to almost any article in one of a dozen prestigious American journals of foreign affairs and you find something like this:

> The answers to two great questions will soon set the direction of the world economy. One: Will the industrialized democracies cooperate to sustain an open, market-oriented world trade and financial order? To do so, they must rise above the different ways they practice capitalism and mounting domestic pressures for economic nationalism. Two: Can these countries integrate into such an order those countries that are turning from state controls toward market capitalism?
> —Robert D. Hormats, "Making Regionalism Safe," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994

Can any sane person really believe that the direction of the world economy—or any other global phenomenon—will be set *soon*, and by the answers to two great questions? As it happens, the same issue of *Foreign Affairs* ran an article by the economist Paul Krugman that pretty well undermined the urgency of this one. Krugman argues persuasively that the current rage for the world economy is a bit of a canard. The effect of world trade on the U.S. economy, for instance, is so small that it almost can be ignored. Our standard of living hinges chiefly on our domestic productivity. What matters is how efficiently we make things for our own consumption, which in turn depends on our willingness to save and invest locally.

Not that it matters very much. One of the characteristics of the above passage, which it shares with nearly all writing about global affairs, is that it will be read with the same grave attention no matter what it says, as long as it says it seriously. (Which is why there are no amusing articles about foreign policy.) The status of the subject does the rest. It is a very definite kind of writing, this global bigthink, distinct from any other except maybe the conservative religious tract.

The first thing you notice after a few hours of flipping through the relevant journals, for example, is a perverse taste for the big blind leap into the future. The incentive system of the global theorist encourages what politely is called vision and more normally is called guessing. To wit: "China is poised to become an economic power in the twenty-first century if centrifugal forces do not pull it apart" (James D. Robinson III, "Moving the Fed into a Global Age," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1994); "Of great service in its first fifty years, the World Bank group will render even greater benefits in its next fifty years if, unlike most institutions, it can adjust to the vast changes that have occurred since its founding" (Henry Owen, "The World Bank: Is 50 Years Enough?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1994); "It is possible to imagine a future of Russian capitalism that asserts itself early in the twenty-first century as the envy of the world" (Jude Wanniski, "The Future of Russian Capitalism," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1992); "The end of the cold war means that the German question, far from being solved, has just begun" (Lanxin Xiang, "Is Germany in the West or in Central Europe?" *Orbis*, Summer 1992); "Given its regional and international influence ... there is reason to hope that Turkey will be able to overcome its difficulties and assume the leadership role for which it seemed destined" (Eric Rouleau, "The Challenges to Turkey," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1993); "In general, the Jugoslav question may be said to be one of time" (Hamil-

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ton Fish Armstrong, *Foreign Affairs*... June 15, 1923).

If there is nothing under the sun that hasn't been predicted by someone in *Foreign Affairs* it is because the price of guessing wrong is low and the rewards for guessing right are high. The global thinkers of the recent past who have enjoyed the greatest acclaim are not those who have been right but those who have been melodramatic. Being wrong by itself does not ensure success, of course. George Kennan was mainly right about the Soviet Union, for example. But everyone now knows that if you are able to make an outlandish prophecy about the globe, or some large part of it, plausible for just a little while, you will forever be treated with respect, as was Malthus. (See the spectacularly wrong arguments of Jean-Francois Revel's *How Democracies Perish*, Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* and Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*.)

Thus the other common trait of this sort of writing: the banality of its language. At first glance you wouldn't expect it. If you had a Big Worldview to air you'd think you would want to serve it to the reader as a giant neon pink soufflé—for all the world to see. But reading the various global prophecies and analyses in prestigious journals is more like eating the hole of a doughnut. (How many articles in THE NEW REPUBLIC on foreign policy do you remember? Me, none except an unintentionally funny one about rebuilding Israel on a reclaimed island in the Mediterranean.) The telling detail goes unreported because no detail is observed. No detail is observed because the writer is not interested in what is right under his nose, assuming he actually ever gets his nose abroad. The imagined world here is literally senseless—no one in it ever tastes, touches, smells, hears or sees. The writer with the big worldview free-floats, like a man in a sensory deprivation tank. Or a dream.

I think the reason for this detachment—in addition to a lack of curiosity about actual foreigners—is that the moment you introduce any sort of concrete detail into the typical piece of globe theory, and thus make it vivid and real, the whole imagined world melts, like a wicked witch under water. The globe-thinker's world is not the world around him. It is the world he sees *down there* from *up here*. His flight from one kind of idiocy takes him nearly full circle into another, into the small group of people who allow themselves to think of the world from above. The delusion of omniscience follows naturally.

The practical consequence of this weird but widely acclaimed global outlook is to channel smart and influential people away from problems they might solve and into problems they cannot. From reading the American newspapers, I know more about race relations in South Africa than I do about race relations in America. The idea of alleviating poverty in our own country has died; meanwhile, through the World Bank, Americans devote billions to alleviating poverty abroad. About the worst way for an American president to boost his poll numbers is to try to govern at home; the best is to travel abroad and have his picture taken with foreigners or, even better, to wage war against them. And so on. Stop thinking of the subject as foreign affairs and start thinking of it as the tendency to focus on events that take place at great emotional and physical distance at the expense of more immediate events, and suddenly our various prestigious global obsessions look more like the tabloid obsession with the O.J. Simpson murder trial. (Like celebrities, foreign countries are handy vehicles for fleeing private life into some publicly staged simulacrum.)

The general belief that what is far away is more important than what is close at hand necessarily corrupts private life. What does it matter if you spend one-half of your day bungling a financial conglomerate if you spend the other half worrying about the world financial order? I recently met a woman who recalls growing up with a mother who was always busy with one foreign cause or another. When she was 5 her mother put her on the bus downtown with a credit card and a note for the salesman at the department store, instructing him to outfit her for the coming school year. It's a small but familiar example of the sort of private moral transaction that can be done by the person who learns to live life globally. I'll bet the deal this woman cut with herself—without articulating it, of course—was something like this: sufficient compassion about the latest Great Global Outrage lets you off the hook in your daily life. There are trade-offs to be made in the private budget of our concerns. What is traded off in a certain kind of worldliness is the sanctity of ordinary existence, the ritual of daily life.

Of course this is nearly the opposite of the current most righteous moral sentiment. A few months ago *The New York Times* published an interview with Susan Sontag in Sarajevo. She compared her decision to be there to George Orwell's fighting in the Spanish Civil War, and declared it was the moral duty of every intellectual to join the Bosnian struggle. Here was Rebecca West one-upped: the junior college professor who remained safely at home nestling to his bosom family and students was not merely an idiot. He was immoral! And I confess that for the tiniest craven moment I almost caved. It was a powerful combination, Orwell's moral authority coupled with my occasional desire to escape the life around me—that tingle of dissatisfaction with the here and now.

But I'm not so sure where Orwell would have put himself were he alive and well in America today. He went to Spain to fight Fascists at a time when fascism threatened his way of life in England. That is, his concern with Abroad grew out of his immediate interests at Home rather than an abstract commitment to fighting evil everywhere on the globe. Orwell's moral authority, like his literary genius, sprung from his ability to see the universal in his own experience. From the black shirts under his nose he rightly understood that he was living in the midst of an international ideological struggle. We are not. From what is under our nose we can see that we are living in a world of neighborhood wars. Who knows? If Orwell had started here and now in America perhaps he would have gone off to fight in Bosnia. But I'd like to think that instead he would have found the road to East L.A. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Flesh and Blood

The short and simple annals of the poor, in Ken Loach's hands, become full-bodied and complex. His latest film, **Ladybird Ladybird** (Samuel Goldwyn), is in the line of such Loach works as *Raining Stones* and *Riff-Raff*, a closer look at the lives and incidents in those newspaper pages that we turn as we get to what really interests us. By now we are all—in Britain and America—comfily satisfied with the difference between the conditions of poor people a hundred years ago and today; it takes a jolt to remind us that indoor plumbing doesn't eradicate all economic problems and personal anguish.

Loach jolts. But a key tone of his films, which makes them more affecting, is that he doesn't deal in pity: he deals in lives. The people in the past two films and this one simply handle what they have to handle, as best as they can. They do not see themselves as an underclass: it's we who, if we will, supply that context. They are too busy getting on with it.

Ladybird Ladybird is set in East London and is (yet again) based on a true story, which is verified by the closing titles. Maggie is a pub singer, in her 30s, who has had four children by four different men. All four children have been taken away from her by social services, which is an agony to her—she adores them.

We get some of her past life, including her own horrid sexually abused childhood, when she meets Jorge, a Paraguayan political exile, responds to his gentleness and confides in him about her four children. He in turn responds to her deep feeling, her travails and, to be sure, her sexuality. Maggie and Jorge begin to live together. He supports them with a restaurant job for which he is underpaid because he overstays his visit and becomes "illegal."

In time they have a daughter, and we see firsthand that Maggie is a doting, warm mother. We know, too, from those flashbacks and from new experiences with social services people, that she is scarily short-fused, explosive. When any difficulties arise, either with social officers or anyone else, she goes wild. This instability, plus her financial state and the fact that she isn't married, cause the government to take her daughter away. Maggie's subsequent stormy behavior at the court hearing only confirms the government action. And this happens again when she has another daughter with Jorge.

He, loyal, patient, perceptive, stays with her—not without some troubled moments, but steadfast. And a closing title tells us that the real Maggie and Jorge have had three more children, whom they have been allowed to keep.

That closing title only increases an uncertainty about the film. As it progresses, we are less and less sure of Loach's focus. Certainly his central character Maggie has all his sympathy, but she also has all his truth. And she is shown to be such a volatile, quickly violent person that it's difficult to argue with the social-service decisions. Those services are shown to be imperfect; Maggie is shown to be devotedly maternal. But who among us can think it ruthless of social welfare to worry about children in the care of this neurotic woman? The fact that her neurosis is explicable doesn't help.

Then there are the three post-film children. What happened to Maggie and her circumstances with Jorge to change the government's view of her fitness? Loach saith not. If we are meant to take Maggie's side throughout, Loach has made this difficult with his very honesty. He may have started out to make a film about the cold cruelty of child welfare, but then, by refusing to load the dice, he created not an argument but a dilemma.

In any case his treatment of the material is in his best style—a combination of documentary candor, technical deftness and sympathetic directing of actors. As Jorge, a Chilean musician named Vladimir Vega soon triumphs over his lack of physical appeal with his tenderness of spirit. (This is *echt* Loach: to take a seemingly unattractive person and let him win us with his being. Thus implicitly Loach criticizes the priorities of most film casting.) Maggie is played by Crissy Rock, who is a stand-up comic in her native Liverpool. Loach led her into territories of pathos and rage that, quite possibly, she didn't know she owned.

George Fenton, who did the music for *Ladybird Ladybird*, also did the score for **Interview with the Vampire** (Warner Bros.), but five weeks before *Vampire* was to open, the producers decided to discard Fenton's music. They commissioned Elliot Goldenthal to write a new

FILMS WORTH SEEING

The Browning Version. *Albert Finney puts a long, varied acting career at the service of his role—an English schoolmaster belatedly finding out about life. Terence Rattigan's play has a soft ending here, but all the acting is fine. (Reviewed 10/31/94)* **Hoop Dreams.** *A patient, perceptive documentary that traces the high school years of two black Chicago basketball aspirants. (10/17/94)* **Pulp Fiction.** *Another item for those (many) who want to spend two hours vicariously murdering. Generally well done, however, with energy and some humor. (11/14/94)* **Vanya on 42nd Street.** *I hope to see this every year for the rest of my life. A run-through "rehearsal" of "Uncle Vanya" by actors who have been working on and off for five years under André Gregory. A unique treasure. (11/7/94)*—**SK**

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score, which was supplied in time to record it for the opening.

Whatever it was that Fenton wrote, Goldenthal's music signals from Moment One that the picture is worried. The camera opens on the Golden Gate Bridge at night, then approaches the San Francisco skyline—all this a pleasant twinkly sight. But under the twinkles, we hear dark menacing music. Nothing that we see justifies this music: we are being prepared aurally (it is hoped) for the first scene, in an apartment where Brad Pitt reveals to a writer who is interviewing him that he is a vampire. Well, maybe the music *has* kept us from giggling just then: the giggles come later.

Anne Rice wrote the screenplay from her novel. I haven't read the novel—the writing in her full-page newspaper ads praising the film was enough Rice prose for me—but those who know the book say the film is faithful in story though weak in atmosphere. In the film I enjoyed the atmosphere much more than the story. Dante Ferretti's production designs and the masterly Philippe Rousselot's cinematography fuse into rich dark inundation; and the director, Neil Jordan—yes, the Neil Jordan who did so well with the relatively innocent bisexuality in *The Crying Game*—does his best to keep us immersed. He and his editor, Mick Audsley, try to never let us draw back to get a clear-eyed view of what's going on.

Pitt tells his interviewer (whose fate any child could foretell) that his vampiric life began in 1791 on his Louisiana plantation with a bite from Tom Cruise (as Rice's *Über*-vampire, Lestat). Pitt has wandered Europe and America to this day, accompanied part of the time by a little girl whom he saved from a plague only to bring her into this half-world. Elaborate swirl and lavishness deck this tale—Paris theaters, great palaces, crooked streets. (Few daylight scenes, of course; we know what the sun does to vampires.) And Goldenthal's music keeps the bath gurgling.

I'll make the ritual obeisance to the venerable ancestors of this film, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932), but I'll omit the potted history of vampirism and its erotic-psychological-metaphysical components. I'll come straight to the crux. (Risky word, that, in discussing vampires, though Pitt says oddly that he adores crucifixes.) Does this picture convince? Do we believe anything more than the clinical fact that vampirism is a persistent myth and that the reasons for it are fairly clear? I was so unconvinced that I kept wondering about practicalities. Where did these vampires get their money? Who paid for those gorgeous clothes and residences? Who dealt with

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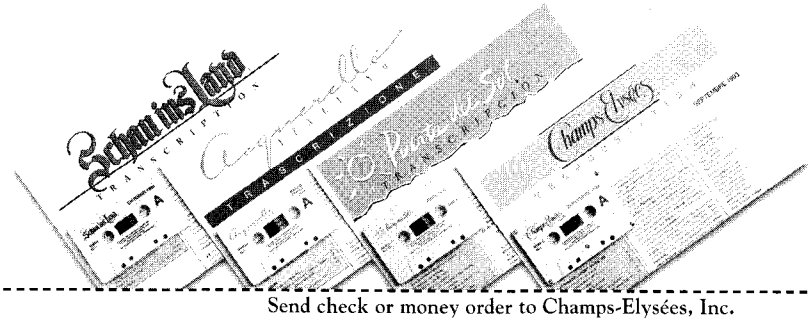

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couturiers and tailors and real estate agents?

Literal-minded to the last, I felt nothing but pity for Tom Cruise, fanged, wigged and costumed, trying hard with his considerable talent to make his sanguinary appetite real. (Been longing for a chance to see Cruise bite a rat's neck and drink its blood? Your prayer is now answered.) Cruise suffers here the worst actor's fate since Jack Nicholson became a wolf. Antonio Banderas has somewhat more success with a European vampire. But who decided that Brad Pitt was a sufficiently resourceful actor to play the lead? Apparently the same sort of minds that think Matthew Broderick and Bridget Fonda are stars. •

Deborah Tannen (and linguists, and feminists, and Bill Clinton) and the cult of consensus.

She Just Doesn't Understand

BY ALAN WOLFE

I.

Deborah Tannen's success as America's conversational therapist began in 1986, with the appearance of *That's Not What I Meant!* "I got hooked on linguistics," she wrote, "the year my marriage broke up." The breaking point came over a simple matter of visiting a relative. "Do you want to go to my sister's?" Tannen asked her husband. "O.K.," he answered. Not completely satisfied that this was a positive response, Tannen chimed in: "Do you really want to go?" At which point he exploded, driving her into desperate anger.

Groping to make sense of what happened, she attended a lecture by a prominent linguist named Robin Lakoff and "a floodlight fell upon the stage of my marriage." It seems that different people have different styles of talking. Her style was literal: "I took it for granted that I would come out and say what I wanted, and that I could ask my husband what he wanted, and that he would tell me." Her husband's style was indirect: "He assumed people hint at what they want and pick up hints." The problem was not that they were dishonest with each other, since each was speaking truthfully. The problem was that they did not understand why they misunderstood. Talking through their problems only made matters worse, because the problem was how they talked.

That's Not What I Meant! constructed upon this example a catalog of miscommunication, an inventory of all the ways that conversational style causes confusion. The world of talk is filled with devices and designs that send messages other than the ones we think we are sending. How loudly or softly we speak, when and how we pause, whether we use irony or humor, whether we make a request in the form of a question or a declaration, how we take turns, whether we interrupt, the forms of address we use, how we frame what we say: all are capable of being misunderstood. Thus linguistics, by teaching us to be more aware of these things, is a path to self-discovery. "I don't know if my marriage would have continued had I discovered linguistics before the breakup instead of right after. But I would have understood better what was going on...." And the same is true for you, gentle reader. "This book is meant to assure you that when conversations seem to be causing more problems than they're solving, you aren't losing your mind. And you may not have to lose (if you don't want to) your friendship, your partner or your money to the ever-gaping jaws of differences in conversational style."

Tannen's book shot to the top of the best-seller list, to be followed by the equally popular *You Just Don't Understand*, and there has now appeared *Talking From 9 to 5*, her latest exercise in therapeutic linguistics. Her success may be attributed at least to two things. The first is that she is writing about the single most common social activity in the world; everyone talks, although not everyone reads, writes or reasons. The second is that she brings to her books ideas from an important, and rarely appreciated, academic discipline. Economists have their magazines, newspaper sections and talk-show guest chairs. Political scientists sometimes get elected to Congress. But linguists? Noam Chomsky would be unknown to the general reading public were it not for his politics. When Tannen hit on the public fascination with talk, she had the field to herself.

The academic side is important to Tannen. Her best sellers always list her Ph.D. on their jackets, right after her name. Even in her most popular books, she introduces herself as a professor. And *Gender and Discourse* assembles some of her scholarly papers. No doubt Tannen's academic credentials are also important to her readers. This is not just your ordinary self-help maven telling you these things. The always reasonable tone of her voice, her regular reliance on technical terms, even the odd markings used by linguists when they analyze a conversation: all these devices convey the message that the author of these books is someone whose advice is based on more than just her opinion. There is theory and there is research to back it up.

II.

Tannen was trained at Berkeley, primarily by John Gumperz and Robin Lakoff. Gumperz argues that linguists get language wrong when they study speakers as individuals rather than

Talking From 9 to 5: How Women's and Men's Conversational Styles Affect Who Gets Heard, Who Gets Credit, and What Gets Done at Work
by Deborah Tannen
(William Morrow, 368 pp., $23)

Gender and Discourse
by Deborah Tannen
(Oxford University Press, 203 pp., $19.95)

You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation
by Deborah Tannen
(Ballantine, 330 pp., $12.50 paper)

That's Not What I Meant!: How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships
by Deborah Tannen
(Ballantine, 214 pp., $10 paper)

Alan Wolfe, chairman of the sociology department at Boston University, is the author most recently of *The Human Difference: Animals, Computers and the Necessity of Social Science* (University of California Press).

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as "members of specific groups." Not only does group membership shape language, but language also shapes group membership. As Gumperz put it (with Jenny Cook-Gumperz), "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language." Lakoff added the emphasis on conversational style, the idea that people, especially men and women, speak in different ways.

Both Gumperz and Lakoff were part of a reaction against the search for universal constants in human behavior. Their ideas seem close to the Sapir-Wharf hypothesis that language shapes thought, "an idea," Tannen notes, "that has been central to linguistics." It is also an idea that has been thoroughly disproved. Steven Pinker, a linguist of a different persuasion, has made mincemeat of the notion that the Inuit have lots of words for snow or that the Hopi are oblivious to time. Still, when properly toned down from the extreme cultural relativism of the early years of anthropology, there is considerable truth in the idea that what we say is partly determined by who we are.

This kind of linguistics lies closer to the "softer" social sciences than to the cognitive sciences or phonetics or morphology. Its aim is not parsimonious explanations of universal features of language, but the careful description of local situations. Tannen wrote her doctoral dissertation about a single dinner party, a two-and-a-half-hour Thanksgiving feast shared by three New York Jews, two Californians and a Brit. Her aim was not to generalize about all talking or all Thanksgiving dinners. Her approach is ethnographic, an approach that critics (of which I am not one) would call anecdotal. This approach defends itself with the claim that human behavior is so complex that a universalizing science is inappropriate for the purpose of understanding it.

Local knowledge, of course, can yield general insights. But the qualifications and the exceptions that make for local knowledge, already at odds with parsimonious explanation, are also at odds with popularization. Who wants to know about one dinner party? We want to know about ourselves; and since Tannen, who has not studied us, wants to tell us about ourselves, she can only do so by making vast generalizations from the cases that she has studied. In her academic work, Tannen writes about specific people; in her popular work, she writes about generic people; and there is little relationship between the two.

The generic individuals that populate Tannen's best sellers are identified by first names: Samantha, Maxwell, Minerva, Jay, Eric. One's first reaction on being introduced to them is to wonder how representative they really are. The fact that Maria thinks that Gordon can't take a joke might be interesting only to Maria and to Gordon, depending on the number of wives who think of their husbands as dunderheads. In shifting from specific cases to generic individuals, in other words, Tannen shifts the grounds of proof. The test of ethnography is insight, but the test of universality is generalization. How representative *is* Maria? This question can only be answered in the form of a bell-shaped curve. Ironically, it is the popular Tannen whose work requires the harder scientific technique. But no such answers are forthcoming. Indeed, no such questions are ever asked. The only thing that matters is whether Maria reminds the reader of herself.

This shift from local description to universal generalization would be difficult for any social scientist, but for one who believes in the power of culture over communication it is especially peculiar. Linguistic strategies, Tannen writes, are influenced by ethnic and national background: Jews are "high involvement" speakers, California Christians strive for "high considerateness." But the generic individuals in her popular books generally lack the marks of identification. Readers are rarely provided the local detail that might make sense of what they say. We have no idea whether these figures are real people, composite portraits or pseudonymous stand-ins. And, in truth, it doesn't much matter. In invoking their existence, Tannen transforms herself from an ethnographer into a fabulist. These figures can be stripped of their identity because they have no identity. They are not interesting for who they are, but for what they illustrate. In her academic work, Tannen begins with individuals and ends with generalizations. In her popular work, she begins with generalizations and fulfills them with individuals.

There is one exception, however, to the anonymity of Tannen's protagonists. We do know their gender. In giving us only this information, Tannen seems to be saying that gender is not only one significant form that culture takes, but it is, for all intents and purposes, the most significant form. This is odd, for Tannen is not a militant feminist. Her ideology is not feminism, it is non-judgmentalism. The ideology of non-judgmentalism is academic (objectivity, scientific detachment) and popular (twelve-step recovery, self-help). The discovery of linguistic style means that men should not be blamed for their aggressiveness and women should not be blamed for their silence. Cool down, everyone, and listen to the reasonableness of everyone: this is Tannen's message, and it is not a message that has been well received by those feminists for whom men are the enemy.

Yet non-judgmentalism is, of course, another way of making judgments, and a poor one. Tannen's judgments are predictable—for example, that women's way of speaking is better. If men and women talk differently, after all, whose language should we use to reconcile their differences? Tannen believes that miscommunication is tragic, and that we should make sincere efforts to understand each other; but she also claims that "the role of peacemaker reflects the general tendency among women to seek agreement." For men and women to communicate, they must do so in a style that favors women.

Tannen the scholar and Tannen the popularizer differ somewhat in the emphasis they give to gender. Her academic writings note that the feminist claim that men dominate women in conversation is hard to reconcile with the feminist complaint that men never talk. Nor is it true that men interrupt women to dominate them; what appears to be interruption can simply be "overlap," two or more people talking at the same time, which is quite common in some cultures. An article seeking to prove that men dominate women in talk is strongly and effectively criticized by Tannen, for it counts interruptions without recognizing ethnographic context. In some cases, she observes, overlapping can be "cooperative," not a "fight for the floor."

Even in her scholarly writings, gender determinism creeps into the analysis. *Gender and Discourse* contains an essay (originally co-authored with Lakoff) that relies entirely on the screenplay of Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes From a Marriage*. Now, social scientists usually examine real events, not imagined ones; but even granting that a genius such as Bergman can tell us something about reality even while writing fiction, he is a Swede. One would think that a cross-cultural linguist would be the first to point out that the way Swedes talk may have little to do with the way Americans talk. To argue that Bergman has created a marriage that tells us about all marriages is to conclude that, as cultural categories, men and women are more important than Swedes and Americans. Culture has to disappear if gender is to be treated as a culture. (Or, to put it professorially, Tannen begins with Gumperz only to deny his major insight.)

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Gender determinism, hinted at in Tannen's academic writing, becomes the rule in her popular writing. Here, too, Tannen insists with benumbing regularity that she never blames anyone. Yet *You Just Don't Understand*, which concentrates entirely on gender, endorses "difference feminism" much more strongly than *Gender and Discourse*. Men and women speak different languages—"genderlects," Tannen infelicitously calls them—because they think in different ways. Females think sideways; they try to make connections, to be supportive, to focus on details. Men, thinking up and down, strive for logic, abstraction and directness. Men engage in report-talk, women in rapport-talk, the one more public, the other more private. A man and a women had an argument over a newspaper article that claimed that students were less idealistic than they were in the 1960s. The man accepted the claim, presumably because the story offered evidence to that effect. The woman was not so sure because her niece and her friends were quite idealistic. Since our society validates abstraction, we ought to value women's ways of speaking more. We have to judge in order to be non-judgmental.

In an afterword to one of the papers collected in *Gender and Discourse*, Tannen writes that she added new examples to *You Just Don't Understand* "to avoid the false impression that my intention was to deny that interruption exists, that overlap can be intended to interrupt or that men can use interruption to silence women." This belated striving for feminist credentials is not completely an afterthought. Although only one of the ten chapters of *That's Not What I Meant!* dealt formally with gender, the war between the sexes provided the bulk of the illustrations in every chapter. Tannen comes closest to her own sentiments when she writes that "we cannot take a step without taking stances that are prescribed by society and gender-specific. We enact and create our gender, and our inequality, with every step we make." Whatever the truth or falsity of such statements, they are neither neutral nor non-judgmental.

III.

For a host of reasons, then, there is little scientific basis to Tannen's claims about the way we talk. But this academic criticism may be unfair. Whatever the state of sociolinguistics as a science, Tannen is simply trying to help people. Shouldn't we judge her by the clinical standard of whether she helps, rather than by the scientific standard of whether she has reality right?

Tannen the clinician proceeds in two steps. First, she asserts the existence of a problem: people miscommunicate, causing conflict. Then she offers a solution: an understanding of miscommunication will facilitate cooperation and lessen conflict. There are major problems, alas, with both claims.

People do miscommunicate—sometimes. They communicate perfectly well at other times. Moreover, miscommunication often leads not to conflict, but to an ambiguous result that allows both sides to cooperate; this result is called diplomacy. And even perfect communication can cause deep conflicts to emerge. Recall Tannen's story about the first marriage. Her former husband became depressed, because she asked him a second time whether he really wanted to go to her sister's. This was not miscommunication. The conflict was a product of their anger toward each other. The communication, which expressed rather precisely their mutual distrust, simply brought it into the open.

Tannen gets the idea that miscommunication is ubiquitous from the influential anthropologist Gregory Bateson. It was, in fact, Bateson's first wife, Margaret Mead, who perfected the anthropologist's technique of making the strange vaguely familiar, only to render it strange again. Tannen is an anthropologist in reverse. She makes the familiar strange, only to render it familiar again. To accomplish this therapeutic task, she relies heavily on Bateson's ideas and terminology: metacommunication, framing, the double bind, complementary schismogenesis.

Metacommunication refers to talk about talk. As a naturalist, Bateson noted not only that various animals communicate with each other, but also that they first communicate about the kind of communication that they will have. It is as if a monkey—Bateson formulated this insight in 1952, after a visit to a zoo in San Francisco—would say something like the following: my next gesture is meant as play, so don't take it as hostile. Humans, obviously, do this, too. We signal, in many ways, whether our words are meant to be ironic, say, or to be taken as uttered. One way in which metacommunication takes place is by framing: a pause in what we are saying indicates a change of context. This can be direct: we might say "let's get serious." Or it can be indirect: we might move to a darker part of the room to express our next thoughts, thereby suggesting greater confidentiality.

Tannen consistently misuses Bateson's terms in her best sellers. When you give someone a gift, she claims, you are not only conveying the actual thing you bought, but the "metamessage" that you care. Or, she points out, the failure of one person to match her friend's complaint with a similar complaint sent a "metamessage" lacking in solidarity. But these are not, technically speaking (and Bateson's terminology is extremely technical), metamessages. Tannen should say "subtext," as when we say one thing but mean another. Both metamessages and subtexts involve the relationship between the speakers, but Bateson's point about metacommunication, a highly abstract one, was an exercise in the theory of logical types, not an empirical observation. Bateson was anything but an empirical social scientist. In the 1936 epilogue to his first book, an anthropological study of an Iatmul congratulatory ceremony in New Guinea, he wrote that "my fieldwork was scrappy and disconnected—perhaps more so than that of most anthropologists." He was less interested in ethnography than in an attempt "to use the explanatory process as an example within which the principles of explanation could be seen and studied"—one reason, perhaps, why Bronislaw Malinowski denounced his theories on the grounds that "the reality of human life is being submitted to some queer and alarming manipulations."

An unorthodox ethnographer at best, Bateson was also uninterested in everyday middle-class life. Whatever else dolphins and schizophrenics—his favorite subjects—have in common, they are not Maria and Gordon. There is little doubt that schizophrenics have communication problems; in a widely cited metaphor, Bateson illustrated "complementary schismogenesis" by asking us to imagine a couple lying under an electric blanket with the controls reversed. Every time he tries to make himself warmer, he makes her warmer instead, so she responds by making him colder. An interesting idea; but is marital communication like this? Bateson himself noted that the process can be reversed, so that "a balance will be reached when the forces of mutual dependence are equal to the schismogenic tendency," with the result that "instead of leading to an increase in mutual hostility, the inverse process leads rather in the direction of mutual love." These qualifications are not found in Tannen, for their implication is that women and men can communicate without her help. Moreover, the destructive form of schismogenesis appears most often in cases of "psychodeviance," which, by definition, is not the typical pattern.

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Unless one believes that all talk follows a similar logic irrespective of species, let alone culture, one would think that Bateson's ideas ought to be used with caution by someone interested in American middle-class life today. Why does Tannen rely on him so much? My guess is that citing Bateson, even if incorrectly, gives her the advantage of claiming that everyday life, far from a simple affair in which things mean what they seem to mean, is treacherous, filled with traps, waiting to surprise (and harm) the innocent. If one believes, by contrast, that most of the time people actually mean what they say—that they know their own motives and have sufficient control over language to express them adequately—then Tannen's entire diagnosis of miscommunication, and the Batesonian structure upon which it improperly lies, collapses. Bateson, who became something of a New Age guru, is the perfect authority not for an ethnographer, but for those who see themselves offering spiritual consolation to the weary of the everyday world.

IV.

Whether it is caused by imperfect communication or perfect communication, is conflict bad? There is no obvious argument that it is bad. Psychological health, self-respect, equality: all these laudable goals may require, in certain situations, that conflict be encouraged.

Tannen devotes a chapter of *That's Not What I Meant!* to what she calls "the intimate critic." In this circumstance, our relationships, which we form for support and for solidarity against the outside world, turn critical within. Partners respond to each other with an arsenal of critical devices: sarcasm, repeating what others say, asking indirect questions, even praising in the wrong way. "The tragedy of all these forms of criticism is that they make one feel unheard or even unloved, and the sense of incompetence they engender can long outlive the arguments or discussions that spawned them." Fortunately, this tragedy can be avoided. Critics should recognize "that some forms of criticism are more destructive than others." The criticized ought to remember "that criticism is a common by-product of closeness." In addition, "one should mount self-defense on the level of the pain—the effect of feeling criticized—rather than skirmishing about the validity of the criticism."

Tannen's advice to avoid the substance of criticism in relationships is bad advice. It would turn all relation-

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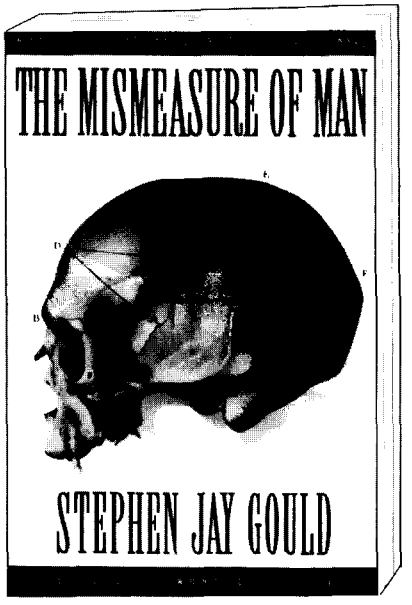

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ships into therapeutic encounters, not thoughtful partnerships. And good relationships, irrespective of social class, *are* thoughtful partnerships; marriage is as much about jointly solving the intellectual demands of life as it is about warmth and intimacy. This is especially the case when children are involved. Being a parent demands hard, critical thinking about some of life's most intractable moral dilemmas. Every parent is a moral philosopher. Isn't it better, then, that husbands and wives argue about the substance of their disagreements, and argue as heatedly as the situation demands?

A strong dose of criticism is also necessary for self-respect. Here is another example of applied Tannen. A man and a woman meet, like each other, spend the night together. Since it was a weekday night, his suggestion that they dawdle a bit and have a leisurely breakfast together is taken by her as romantic and exciting. No sooner does she agree than he picks up the newspaper, into which his head is soon buried. "Had she known nothing of the gender differences I discuss," Tannen writes, "she would simply have felt hurt and dismissed this man as yet another clunker. She would have concluded that, having enjoyed the night with her, he was now availing himself of her further services as a short-order cook." Luckily, however, this woman had heard Deborah Tannen lecture. Hence she realized that, "unlike her, he did not feel the need for talk to reinforce their intimacy. The companionability of her presence was all that he needed...."

To which I can only respond: the feminist critics of Tannen are, on this matter at least, right. This woman had every right to throw the creep out of her house. If she wanted a relationship with him, she should have torn the paper out of his hands and told him that his oafish ways had better change fast. Any other response not only undermines her self-esteem, it also shows no respect for him. Surely Tannen is correct that criticism can be out of place, but so can the failure to criticize.

In an important book called *Pluralism*, the philosopher Nicholas Rescher recently argued that consensus does not deserve the moral benefit of the doubt. The same is true of cooperation. "It makes good sense to revise beliefs to accommodate them to other *evidence*," Rescher wrote, "but it makes no rational sense to revise them to accommodate other *people*." Of course this is a man talking, no doubt a man influenced by Kant, for whom moral judgments based on the idiosyncratic characteristics of "mere" individuals were inevitably wrong judgments. Still, one need not adopt Kant's high-minded standards to realize that the respect that we have for other people is as much respect for *what* they say as *how* they say it.

One of Tannen's goals is to make speech more fair. If men speak one way and women speak another way, and if our society gives more respect to the former rather than the latter, then fairness demands that we design our institutions so that women's voices can be heard. After all, speaking is empowerment. When we give voice to an idea, we are also, to use Albert Hirschman's term, giving voice: that is, we are expressing our opinion about the way in which our institutions are run rather than exiting from those institutions in search of better opportunities elsewhere. This sounds reasonable. Yet Tannen's insistence on giving priority to the way we talk rather than to what we say does not in fact produce fairer results, as a look at her latest book demonstrates.

V.

In *Talking From 9 to 5*, Tannen concentrates on the world of work, especially in large, hierarchical organizations. As her focus moves from bedrooms to boardrooms, the distinction between cooperation or conflict becomes crucial.

The new book argues that much of what we attribute to gender discrimination can also be viewed as asymmetries of communicative style. One reason why the glass ceiling exists is that promotion within firms is based on certain expectations of how people will talk—decisively, in a take-charge manner—that are gender-biased. Women are more interested in getting the job done than they are in boasting about their accomplishments. Women not only fail to brag, they also tend not to demean others. As Tannen says of herself, "I am always careful not to make anyone look bad." No wonder women are stopped before they reach the top.

Some women do reach the top, but this does not put an end to the problems that flow from the incompatibility between women's way of talking and corporate culture. A boss exercises authority, "but the very notion of authority is associated with maleness." Women respond to the authority that they possess by downplaying it. If, on the other hand, they relish in their power, they are accused of being a Dragon Lady, of denying their femininity. The result is a classic Batesonian double bind.

Unlike private relationships, where people have more power to determine together the nature of their interaction, "someone who takes a job is entering a world that is already functioning, with its own characteristic style already in place." That world is, from top to bottom, biased against female conversational styles. Women apologize more than men. They speak more indirectly. They tend not to dominate meetings. They are left out of the sports talk and the dirty jokes. Their concerns about sexual harassment make men wary of them. Great gains have been made by women in the world of work, but if these different evaluations of conversational style are allowed to persist, those gains will go for naught.

What to do? "I would not advise women to adopt men's styles to succeed—although, in some cases, in some ways, this might work." The fault lies not in men and women, nor even in sexism. The fault lies in our culture's valuation of men's way of speaking more than women's. Hence we must revise our institutions to give more recognition to women's ways of talking. What we need is a kind of communicative affirmative action, procedures that will distribute equally the opportunity to speak.

Tannen believes that unstructured groups—meetings in which the rules for turn-taking in speech are unspecified—are unfair. "Running a meeting in an unstructured way seems to give equal opportunity to all. But in practice, conversational style differences result in unequal opportunity." Instead, time should be devoted at meetings to discussions of process; group leaders ought to encourage those who are silent to speak out. We also might "invite individuals to submit their opinions in writing either before or at the meeting, so they will not be unduly influenced by what others say before their turn comes next." The point is to avoid giving disproportionate attention to those who argue most vociferously, even most persuasively, for their point of view. Even negotiation can be a trap, since

> it may be in the interests of companies to allow more decisions to be made independently by individuals whose judgment they trust, so that those judgments will not be subject to negotiations with others whose styles may give them an advantage, regardless of whose ideas are superior.

Tannen's proposals for corporate governance build upon this distaste for consensus from below. Inclusion cannot be trusted to happen by itself; and so, for everyone to speak, facilitators are required. The facilitators, moreover, need the backing of regulations and rules. Ultimately democracy itself may be a trap, unless it is correctly structured. As Tannen writes, "'democratic' principles,

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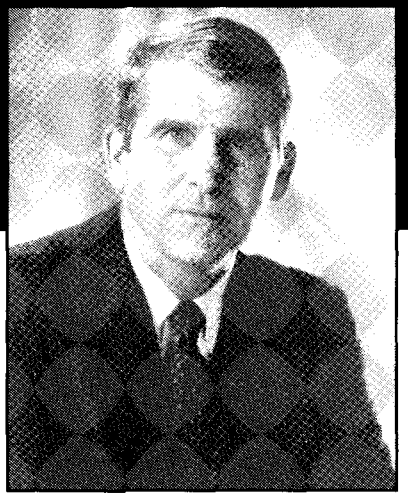

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which seem to be self-evidently desirable, don't always end happily for everyone and—most important—may not always result in the best decisions being made."

This skepticism toward democratic deliberation may be why Tannen includes in her book some revealing remarks on Japanese management style. "Americans tend to assume that hierarchy precludes closeness," she writes, "so employers and employees cannot 'really' be friends, and if they do become friends, complications arise that must be worked out. I myself was inclined to assume that hierarchy is distancing, so that taking a one-up position is synonymous with pushing someone away. But the Japanese perspective made me rethink that assumption." It turns out that Asians think differently about hierarchy than Americans. For the Japanese, dependency is not necessarily a bad thing, since "there are obligations as well as privileges that go along with both the superior and the subordinate roles." If we Americans were open to the way other cultures think about these things, we would realize that hierarchy can be "close and mutually, not unilaterally, empowering." (In this one sentence Bateson, Japan worship, industrial policy and corporate psychobabble all come together.) We even have such relationships in our own culture: mother-child bonding and sibling relationships are hierarchical, but they are also loving.

But we tried this way once. It was called paternalism. Not much is gained by calling it maternalism. What was abusive about it is precisely what Tannen likes: it did not allow for conflict and argument. When conflict came, it took the form of labor unions—organizations based on the premise that conflict was preferable to cooperation when it comes to issues of distributive justice. Corporations, Tannen rightly argues, are not meant to be run democratically, and are by design hierarchical; but issues that raise questions of democratic participation nonetheless take place within them. Those issues can be resolved through conflict or through cooperation. The historical experience of America and the realities of certain countries in Asia suggest that conflict—the deep-seated antagonism of the other, the suspicion of his or her intentions and motives, the wariness even to talk to him or her—is the stuff of democracy; and that cooperation—procedures that focus on style rather than substance, efforts to elicit participation from all, reasonableness in tone and mutually in regard—is the stuff of elite control.

Tannen would like more meetings to adopt the Japanese practice of *nemawashi*. "The Japanese," she writes, "believe that people are much more likely to express their true feelings (*honne*) in private, informal conversations than they are in a meeting, which is public, formal and likely to elicit more "false fronts" (*tatemae*), or "socially acceptable feelings." *Nemawashi* is a system in which "managers in neutral or intermediate positions go around, talk privately to each person who will be at the meeting, get everyone's opinions and coordinate everyone's interest." We tend not to do this, to our detriment. "The history of the Gulf war might have been different if our leaders had practiced *nemawashi*."

If *nemawashi* works, it does so by sacrificing accountability. Decisions made in public have to be exposed to the countering views of all sides. Such decisions, subject to the give-and-take of argument and disagreement, may not be perfect, but they are tested, moderated, broadened and, when necessary, altered. They also come pre-justified, for the very process of hammering them out is what guarantees that they will have public support. Ideas that go through the kind of screening to which liberal democracy subjects them have a kind of built-in resilience. Public justification involves both speaking and listening: it is as important to hear what others say as it is to have one's own say.

In Tannen's world, by contrast, everyone can speak, but no one need listen. Since consensus-building takes place behind the scenes, there is no argument with the ideas of others. The ideas of others are never really heard. It would no longer be necessary to persuade others, to make a compelling case for one's beliefs or even to articulate one's thoughts with the help of others. *Nemawashi*, applied to America, would encourage gossip, false accusation, cowardice, rumor, disinformation and elite manipulation. (McCarthyism was a kind of *nemawashi*.) Rely more on that way of making decisions in the corporate world, and greater equality between men and women will certainly be the result: men and women will be treated in equally irresponsible ways.

VI.

Tannen entered the corporate world, she tells us, because she wanted to leave behind private speech for what she calls "private speaking in a public context." If this trajectory continues, her next book will be about public talk in public settings. And when she arrives there, she will have to deal directly with the anti-democratic aspects of her thought. For, as applicable as democracy may or may not be to corporations, it remains the operative ideal for an open and public political system.

We already have an idea of what Tannen the political pundit will say. Even in her first best seller, she understood that her work had political implications. For what is politics but talk, and what is political conflict but disagreement? The flaws in our politics, like the flaws in our marriages, can be fixed, if we understand that "the processes of conversational style that play themselves out in private conversations are also at the heart of public and international relations." Affirmative action, she suggested, "has not worked as well as expected," and the reason is miscommunication.

> Most Americans genuinely believe that everyone should be given equal opportunity. But they balk in confusion, disillusionment and dismay when culturally different people, having been optimistically admitted, do not behave in expected (and they think self-evidently appropriate) ways.

What's true for the country, moreover, is true for the world. "International relations are largely a matter of individuals sitting down and talking to each other...." Linguistics can help prevent nuclear war.

Language, in short, has become the language of politics. We don't speak because we disagree; we disagree because we speak. Hobbes believed that people would inevitably be at war, and require a sovereign to keep the peace. Tannen thinks that people would inevitably be at peace, except that miscommunication keeps them in a state of war. We ought to turn our attention from substance to style. Get our national conversation on the right track, and political civility will follow. (And there is no higher value, in her political universe, than civility.) If marriages can be made to work, so can Congress.

The politics of Tannenism cannot be overlooked in any effort to account for her success. She is singularly of her moment. American politics does seem to have reached a new stage of partisan ugliness, as political parties and interest groups noisily exaggerate their own case and denigrate the case of their opponents. There is considerable polling evidence that Americans are disgusted by the whole spectacle. And the reminder that this kind of public bickering is as old as the republic, and may have healthy consequences for the body politic, falls on deaf ears. Americans hate politics because they detest the conversational style in which it takes place.

Are Tannen's ideas about language

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appropriate, then, to American politics? Interestingly enough, we have a test case. It is the conversational style of the most public marriage in America. Think of Clintonism not as a political ideology, but as a conversational style. It seems to have two faces. The first is *nemawashi.* Rather than hammering out a consensus for health care in public, Ira Magaziner is hired to talk in the strictest privacy to various thinkers, politicians and interest groups. (From public reports of these private decisions, they seem to reflect the conversational style of Hillary Clinton, the one who is the unelected partner in the marriage, and, by her very position, not part of a process of public legitimation.)

The second face of the sociolinguistics of Clintonism is the attempt to avoid criticism when private decisions become public knowledge. The president is the empathic listener of the team, the one who follows, by all accounts, every one of Tannen's techniques for conveying sincerity in the way he talks. He is the conflict-averse, sympathetic, willing to change his mind, always-there husband. (Well, almost always there.) And when he speaks in public, he is the misunderstood idealist, the one with the positive plans whose intentions are questioned and whose motives are suspect. The critics are all cynics. Confronted with substantial objections to his policies, Clinton tends to respond at the level of style. He invests little in ideological squabbles over policy, preferring to send messages of compromise and accommodation.

Time will tell whether the conversational style of Clinton improves the quality of American political life or fuels its downward spiral. But Tannen has already made up her mind. She likes the Clinton style. A professor at Georgetown University, Tannen is not averse to an occasional foray into the public limelight. She got her big break in 1992, when fifty power-wielders—including Senators Gore, Mikulski, Bradley, Robb, Pell, Lieberman, Fowler, Biden, Simpson, Kassebaum and Specter, as well as numerous spouses and children—listened to her discussion of male/female miscommunication as penance for the spectacle of the Hill-Thomas hearings.

But it was on December 31, 1993, that Tannen came into her own as a pundit to power. Clinton had been elected president. And speaking at the Renaissance Weekend in Hilton Head, South Carolina, Tannen told her audience that "a culture of critique" is overtaking America. Like her Gordons and Marias, we scream at each other instead of cooperating to find the truth. Her central message was that she was opposed to opposition.

She made the usual disclaimers that journalists should ask tough questions and that intellectuals should point out the weaknesses of each other's arguments, and then she said this:

> But when opposition becomes the overwhelming avenue of inquiry, when the lust for opposition exalts extreme views and obscures complexity, when our eagerness to find weaknesses blinds us to its strengths, when the atmosphere of animosity precludes respect and poisons our relations with one another, then the culture of critique is stifling us. If we could move beyond it, we would move closer to the truth.

She published her New Year's sermonette to the Clintonites in *The New York Times.* Three months later, she was more specific in an essay in *The Los Angeles Times.* The Clintons are just trying to do their jobs, she wrote, especially the job of providing health care for everyone. But the media won't leave them alone, hounding them with Whitewater, a trivial event that "was dragged to light by reporters digging in Little Rock garbage, searching for something—anything—to provide the exposure of errors that our public discourse now requires."

I learned two things from reading Deborah Tannen. One is that meaning depends on context, on the local circumstances in which speech takes place.

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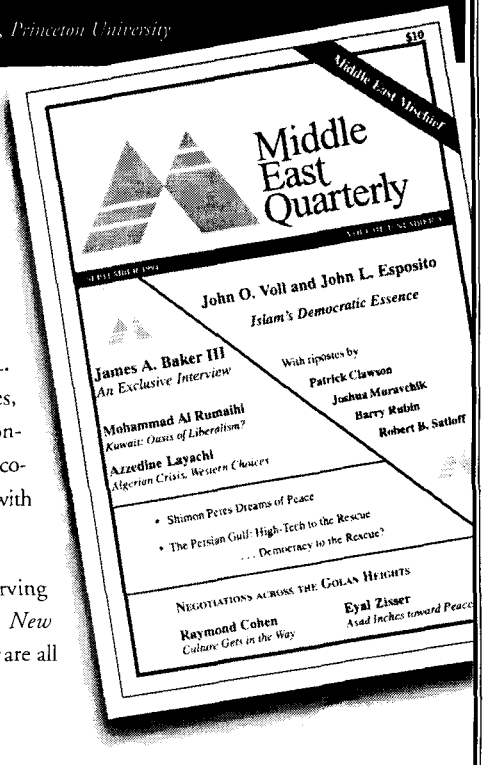

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The other is that every message conveys an overt meaning and a less obvious subtext. And so, applying these lessons to Tannen's little address at Hilton Head, I conclude that her message could not have been clearer. It was this: you, the powerful, have been misunderstood by them, the envious. This is not a voice of reason, equality and fair participation. This is a voice that, applied to the rough and tumble public world, delegitimates opposition and corrodes democratic practice. It is a good thing that there exists neither scientific evidence nor strong moral and normative argument to back it up. •

Unsentimental Journey

BY JAROSLAW ANDERS

Trans-Atlantyk
by Witold Gombrowicz
translated by Carolyn French and Nina Karsov

(Yale University Press, 122 pp., $20)

East European writers, as we have been told for years, are moral legislators of their people. They are supposed to stand like immovable rocks in the turbulent sea of the region's history. On a closer look, however, they appear, with a few notable exceptions, to be a strangely mercurial and unstable lot. It is not uncommon to see the same defender of absolute truths transform himself over the years from a devout Catholic into a zealous Stalinist, a dissenting Marxist, a leftist liberal, a free-market libertarian, a communitarian conservative and back into a devoted Catholic, all the while insisting upon an aura of uncompromising moral authority.

From his first literary attempts in the late 1920s until his death in 1969, the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz not only avoided those strange intellectual vicissitudes, but also offered a rather plausible explanation of the East European phenomenon in his own radical philosophy of endlessly shifting, transforming selfhood. In his three-volume *Diary*, published in English not long ago by Northwestern University Press and considered by many his most accomplished work, Gombrowicz advanced a theory that Polish writers are individuals only in a superficial sense. They are, in fact, social institutions, he claimed, "inhibited by something impersonal, superior, inter-human and collective emanating from the milieu ... Polish thought, Polish mythology, the Polish psyche." Overwhelmed by their sense of importance and duty, they almost never feel free to develop their own spirits and become masters of their imaginations.

In a country like Poland, suggested Gombrowicz, one does not become a writer to express something personal and authentic—a vision, an idea. One chooses the role of a writer and then looks around for a vision or an idea that at a given moment serves the writer's Promethean task. As a result, those who selflessly devote themselves to some high communal ideal are likely to change that ideal with every turn of history. On the other hand, those who choose the path of self-centered individualism, like Gombrowicz himself, often turn out more consistent and solid, as artists and as men. The self, even a transforming and capricious one, is a more powerful moral anchor, claimed Gombrowicz, than any abstract "system" imposed on the individual by the cultural milieu.

Gombrowicz built his literary reputation on many such paradoxes. He was a Polish writer who did not care much for Polish literature, a modernist who derided most of the major currents of modernity and a skeptical, dialectical mind with moralistic inclinations. In the 1970s some critics tried to present him as a forerunner of postmodernism, but in his own time he did not fit into any category. The fact that he spent most of his creative life in Argentina, a most unlikely place for a Polish writer, seems retrospectively quite logical, almost providential.

Trans-Atlantyk, Gombrowicz's first work written in exile and published in 1952 in Paris, is an autobiographical fantasy about his first days in Argentina. The real trip was almost as bizarre as the one described in the novel. On the eve of World War II, a young writer with only one novel to his credit, and a reputation for being a cynic and a jester, Gombrowicz was invited by the Polish government to take part in the maiden voyage of the ocean liner *Boleslaw Chrobry*. Together with another young writer he was to be paraded before the Polish community in Argentina as an "ambassador of Polish culture." It remains a mystery why the Polish government invited Gombrowicz to take part in this trip, and why the writer accepted the dubious assignment. Gombrowicz's irreverence toward national solemnities, and his unconventional literary style, surreal and conceptual at once, made him a strange choice for a literary envoy to conservative Polish *estancieros* in Argentina. Besides, war was inevitable, and one would expect the Polish government to have had more important things on its mind.

Indeed, war broke out, a few days after the *Chrobry* docked in Buenos Aires. Overcome by the absurdity of the situation, and by the empty patriotic rhetoric of his travel companions, Gombrowicz decided to stay in Argentina rather than return to Europe. Yet the role of a wretched emigré lost in the Argentinean pampa seemed to him equally absurd, and it required a radical gesture. "I felt anachronistic, draped in an antique style, entangled in some sort of almost ancient scleroticism—and this cheered me up so much that I immediately commenced writing something that was to have been an antiquated memoir from that time," he recalled many years later. "In my position it was important to write something quickly which could be translated and published in foreign languages. Or, if I wanted to write something for the Poles, something which didn't injure their national pride." Instead Gombrowicz produced a novel that was practically untranslatable, and that went to great lengths to offend its Polish readers. "What a luxury I permitted myself in my misery!" marveled the author in an interview given near the end of his life.

One has to commend the English translators of the book, Carolyn French and Nina Karsov, for tackling the challenge with daring and grace. For the challenge is considerable: the style of *Trans-Atlantyk* is a parody of the seventeenth-century Polish tale developed as an oral genre by the Polish gentry. Later on it acquired the status of the style most representative of the worst and the best features of the "Polish mentality" as it was envisioned by the Romantic mythmakers. This style, boastful and hyperbolic, full of bizarre neologisms and grammatical monstrosities, was said to convey the rugged pastoral chivalry, the verbal jingoism and the drunken fantasy of provincial Polish squires. The original Polish tales from that time were usually

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fantastic narratives about military exploits, or, like Gombrowicz's novel, picaresque stories about travels to remote and fantastic lands.

The translators point out that, in their search for an English equivalent, they reached for the language of Samuel Pepys and the lesser prose writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The result is a highly inventive linguistic mixture that conveys much of the energy and the self-parody of the original. By no fault of the translators, however, it lacks the rich historical associations and the literary references of Gombrowicz's work. This is unfortunate, because most of the novel's meaning is conveyed through particular resonances of its language. Retold in uncontemporary English, the episodes of the story may sound too much like the antiquated farce they were supposed to mock.

In one of the opening scenes, the protagonist, who bears Gombrowicz's name, sneaks down the gangway of a ship—the symbolic Polish "ship of state"—departing from Argentina to Poland. With evident relief, he inveighs against its martyred motherland:

> Sail, sail, you Compatriots, to your People! Sail to that holy Nation of yours haply Cursed! Sail to that St. Monster Dark, dying for ages yet unable to die! Sail to your St. Freak, cursed by all Nature, ever being born and still Unborn! Sail, sail, so he will not suffer you to Live or Die but will keep you forever between Being and Non-being. Sail to your St. Slug that she may ever the more Enslime you.

Soon afterward, however, the protagonist falls into the snare set by a group of Argentinean Poles who inflate his literary reputation and set him up for a verbal duel with a local literary celebrity, supposedly to win respect for their country's artistic genius:

> And here Pyckal and the Baron into my ear: "Yoicks, yoicks!" Likewise the Counsellor from the other side: "Yoicks, yoicks, sick him, yoicks!" Say I: "I am not a dog." Whispered the Counsellor: "Sick him, else Shame for he is their most Famous Author and it cannot be that they Celebrate him when the Great Polish Author, Genius is in the room! Bite him, you chitsht, you genius, bite him for if not, we will bite you!

This scene is only the first of many humiliations that befall the bemused hero. No sooner does he manage to elude his literary persecutors than he gets entangled in a bizarre tug-of-war between Colonel Tomasz, a noble Polish gentleman, and Gonzalo, a rich Argentinean homosexual who has set his eyes on Tomasz's young son Ignac. Forced to serve as a procurer, a false friend and a

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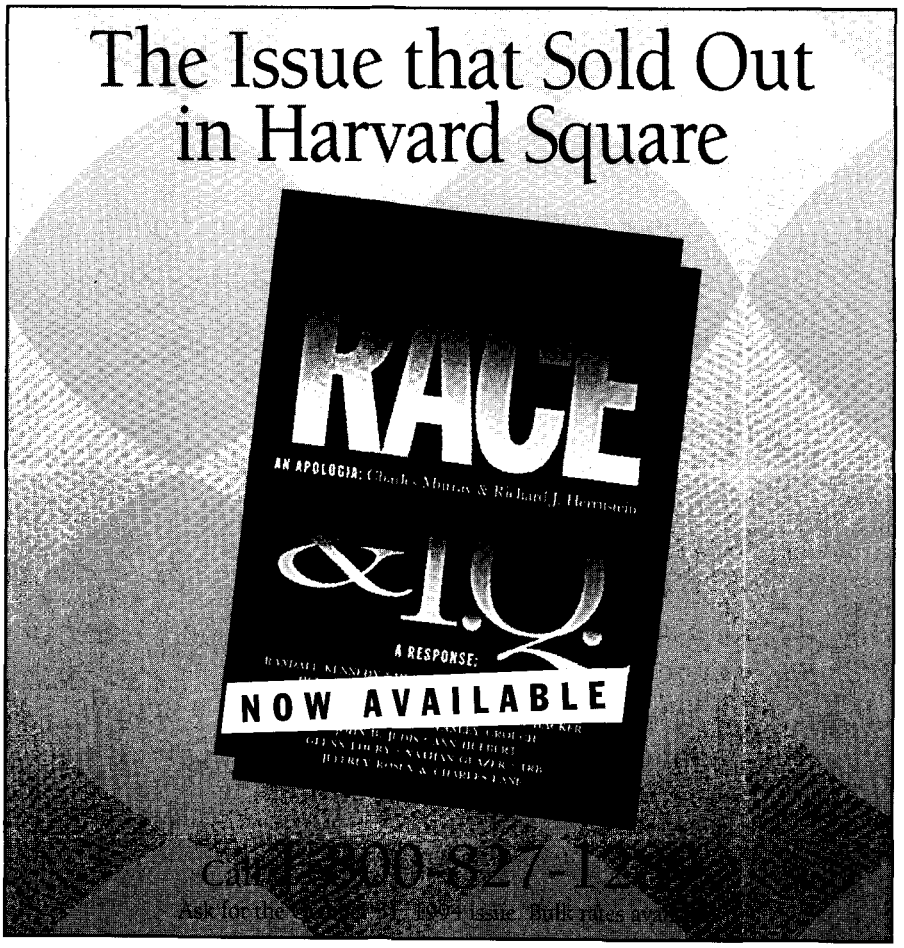

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second in a duel, the protagonist is torn between "Patria," the conservative, patriotic and authoritarian world of the father, and "Filistria," the anarchic, morally ambiguous and exciting kingdom of sons, into which Gonzalo tries to lure the innocent Ignac.

As in most novels and dramas by Gombrowicz, the battle for the hero's soul is fought by proxy as a battle for the body of a younger, immature and often "inferior" person. Soon the novelistic "Gombrowicz" discovers that Tomasz, in order to wipe the stain from his Polish honor, designs to kill Ignac with his own hand, while Gonzalo wants to incite Ignac to kill his own father. The plot grows even more fantastic when the hero is kidnapped and forcefully initiated into a secret society called the Order of the Chevaliers of the Spur, which is in search of a sublime crime plot to assassinate the Polish ambassador.

All this would be more than sufficient material for a farce about the phantasmagoric, insecure world of an emigré, and about the Polish proclivity for self-aggrandizement, especially in a time of defeat. Yet the archaic, stylized language of the novel adds a strangely hollow and ominous resonance to the narrative. Its characters resemble miscast actors who are painfully uncomfortable in their roles and try to fill the inner void with the most conventional gestures and rhetoric. Emptiness is the novel's predominant theme. The duel between Tomasz and Gonzalo is fought with empty pistols. Gonzalo's magnificent mansion, though filled with treasures, emanates vacancy and banality. The secret society was created out of a sense of emptiness by a humble accountant. "Empty, empty, empty ..." is the refrain repeated by the protagonist whenever he is called upon to take a moral stance. In the final scene of the novel, the emptiness erupts in a sudden burst of laughter that overpowers the characters and, happily, foils all their murderous plans. Yet the ending seems itself rather empty and inconclusive, as if the writer decided to walk away from his subject instead of striving for some kind of resolution.

Gombrowicz admitted in an interview that one of the aims of the novel was to explode the "Polish legend" and to provoke his compatriots who were living among "chimeras, illusions, phraseology." While in Argentina he was irked by a tendency to turn the Polish tragedy into a political and moral cliché. He once remarked that Poland's problem was less that of "bad press" than of "bad poetry." He was also disturbed by his compatriots' willingness to perpetuate this lachrymose style and constantly to invoke the names of Copernicus, Chopin and Kościuszko as a claim to the world's sympathy and support. Gombrowicz believed that such behavior was embarrassing and counterproductive. He insisted that the true liberation of Poland should start with the liberation of a Pole from the "Polish legend." Because the legend tightened its grip at times of historical disasters, such liberation required a deliberately crass and provocative gesture: "Like a burst of laughter at a funeral."

And yet Gombrowicz often protested that his contentious and convoluted relationship with his "Polishness" was merely a manifestation of a much more universal question at the heart of his writing. What was at issue in *Trans-Atlantyk* and his other works, he said, was nothing less than the problem of modern man's identity, or, to use Gombrowicz's favorite term, of his Form. Like most modernists, Gombrowicz believed that modern man, bereft of God and a clear definition of his self, must create himself out of nothingness. Unlike most other modernists, however, he perceived this process neither as a lonely effort of the autonomous human will, nor as a work of anonymous social forces. In his *Diary*, Gombrowicz wrote:

> I do not deny that the individual is dependent on his milieu—but for me it is far more important, artistically far more creative, psychologically far more profound and philosophically far more disturbing that man is also created by an individual man, by another person. In chance encounters. Every minute of the day.

Man, claimed Gombrowicz, exists only in relation to other men. When left alone he is a shapeless, changeable lump of contradictions. He receives Form—his "self," his character, his multiple public images—in myriads of encounters with others. The persona by which he knows himself, and is known to the world, is defined not within an individual, but in the inter-human space that Gombrowicz called the "inter-human church." The process is philosophically disturbing, says the writer, because no one really controls it—neither the individual nor his environment. Form appears "like a wave made up of a million tiny particles, which takes on a specific form every minute." Thus created, Form is often ridiculous and awkward. Most importantly, however, it is the only thing modern man can hold on to when describing his "identity." There is no "authentic" self that can be "liberated" from Form. Man is always artificial, and his rebellion inevitably turns into a new Form. "Form is not in harmony with the essence of life, but all thought which tries to describe this imperfection also becomes Form and thereby only confirms our striving for it."

In Gombrowicz's world, disaster strikes when ossified Form becomes the driving force in an individual or a community. As *Trans-Atlantyk* clearly shows, the aspect of Form that intrigued him most was the "national identity" and the strange claims it often puts on the individual. Yet most of the characters in the novel—the Polish patriots, the literati, the conspirators, even the dandy Gonzalo—seem to be trapped inside several, often contradictory Forms. If there is a darker shadow lurking behind their seemingly comic exploits, it is probably because at the time that *Trans-Atlantyk* was written Gombrowicz was painfully aware of the destructive force of Form when it becomes a unifying principle in a mass society. In an interview published toward the end of his life, he observed:

> I saw with amazement how, with the war, Europe, particularly Central and Eastern Europe, entered a demoniacal period of formal mobilization. The Nazis and the Communists fashioned menacing, fanatical masks for themselves; the fabrication of faiths, enthusiasm and ideals resembled the fabrication of cannons and bombs. Blind obedience and blind faith had become essential, and not only in the barracks. People were artificially putting themselves into artificial states, and everything—even, and above all, reality—had to be sacrificed in order to obtain strength.

It is quite possible that in his Argentinean exile Gombrowicz experienced the shocking truth of his times more deeply than he was ready to admit: the ideological and political lunacy of the twentieth century could not be adequately explained either by "objective" historical processes, or by a primordial evil of human nature. In fact, it did not seem to have any explanation beyond the "artificial states" of the collective mind that appeared out of nowhere and obliterated individual conscience. "Does man kill or torture because he has come to the conclusion that he has the right to do so?" asked Gombrowicz. "He kills because others kill. He tortures because others torture."

Yet if there is no escape from Form, as Gombrowicz seemed to believe, how could such tragedies be avoided? There is no clear answer to those questions in Gombrowicz's world. The only clue is the burst of laughter at the end of *Trans-Atlantyk*. In order to save oneself from the dictatorship of Form, he seems to

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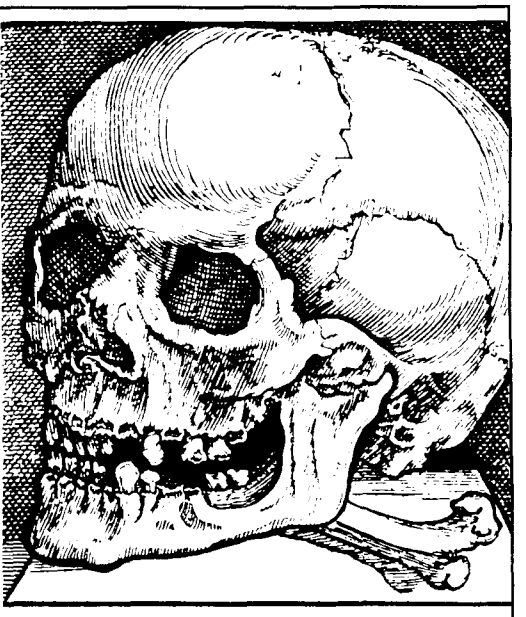

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suggest, modern man has to learn to treat his own ideals, his art, his political doctrines a little bit less seriously. He needs to become aware of the artificiality of all Great Ideas, especially when they compel one to Great Deeds. Only in this way can he transform himself from someone who has Form into someone who creates Form. In 1954, he wrote in his *Diary*:

> To be a concrete man. To be an individual. Not to strive to transform the whole world. To live in the world, changing it only as much as possible from within the reach of my nature. To become real in harmony with my needs, my individual needs.
>
> I do not want to say that collective and abstract thought, that Humanity as such, are not important. Yet a certain balance must be restored. The most modern direction of thought is one that will rediscover the individual man.

Gombrowicz's message of radical skepticism and individualism, combined with his iconoclasm, made him an anathema among emigré Poles, but—as we learn from an informative introduction by Stanislaw Baranczak—it met with a surprisingly positive response among the young, postwar intelligentsia in Poland, where some of his works started to be available after the thaw of 1956. A writer who sneered at the role of a "committed" intellectual as "too pretentious and too frivolous" became, paradoxically, one of the mentors of the dissenting intelligentsia of the '60s and '70s. Gombrowicz was a perfect antidote to the nationalist pieties that were practically the only available language of anti-Communist opposition. He cautioned against the dangers of excessive loyalty to the East European heritage of doom. He demonstrated that repeated historical disasters have hampered the spiritual development of the region and made the intellectual classes too self-conscious to be really creative, and to achieve the spiritual freedom necessary to oppose collectivist doctrines.

This attitude, together with Gombrowicz's famous egotism and his disdain for literary idols (he considered Borges "unintelligent" and Proust "full of faults," and even tried to show that Dante's tercets could have been better written), made him delightfully subversive and liberating, especially in the stifling years of decaying communism. In retrospect, however, this iconoclast and intellectual rogue appears almost an apostle of normalcy and moderation. The rediscovery of the individual, the counsel of restraint in national self-adulation, the priority of concrete tasks over abstract ideals: all this sounds like a rather reasonable program for today's Eastern Europe.

In one of his notes Gombrowicz expressed hope that Eastern and Central Europeans would one day assimilate the terrible experiences of the war and the postwar decades and turn them into their intellectual and spiritual capital. Those experiences would not make them any better than the rest of us (Gombrowicz derided the idea that suffering ennobles the spirit), but they would put them in touch with reality, and would allow them to crawl from under their historical myths and build their future according to their ordinary human needs.

Sadly, in many quarters of the post-Communist world, something akin to a new "formal mobilization" seems to be taking place. It is hard not to see the Yugoslav tragedy, at least psychologically, as the product of an absurd "artificial state" of mind that managed to inflate minor variations of custom and dialect into full-scale "national conflict," and allowed otherwise normal people to kill and to rape their neighbors and co-workers with a clear conscience. Even in less afflicted parts of the region, there are political and intellectual leaders who seem to resemble the hero of *Trans-Atlantyk*, lost in alien territory, tormented by a sense of vacuity and pursued by the "chimeras, illusions, phraseology" of the past. If Gombrowicz were alive to witness this spectacle, he would probably conclude that the problem of a new identity for his native realm has not yet been resolved. As early as 1957, he wrote that only when his compatriots manage to "get at least one foot out of history" will their future finally come to life.

JAROSLAW ANDERS is a Polish writer living in Washington, D.C.

Sounds of Silence

BY ANNE HOLLANDER

Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film by James Card

(Knopf, 319 pp., $35)

James Card thinks of himself as a precious vessel, and he's right, for those who prize living memory. He is a walking archive, a human repository of cinematic experience; and his book is the personal account of a passion for movies that began in 1918 when he was a child, a decade or so before sound. Card's youthful obsession was eventually channeled into fifty years of relentless collecting and a perpetual championship of the movies from what he calls the pre-dialogue period. It is there, during the first forty-five years of moving pictures—he dates cinema from Muybridge's Zoopraxiscope in 1880—that Card finds all the life and health of the medium during its subsequent history. He is not alone, of course, in holding this view, but he can claim to be among the few with personal experience to support it. He eventually helped found the George Eastman House of Photography in Rochester, New York, where the film archive began with his own collection of silents.

Card tells how he became an avid collector of movies when he was in high school, cleverly rigging his hand-cranked Keystone Moviegraph (bought in a Cleveland department store in 1921) to take 1,000-foot reels of 35mm film, so he could show full-length features at home, instead of the short excerpts that were quite enough fun for most people. And so he began a kid's collection, buying and swapping movies with fellow enthusiasts; but he never grew out of it. The advent of sound dialogue seems only to have confirmed his passion for silent film and his belief in its superiority, at the same time confirming the limits of his cinematic perspective and—consequently—of his aesthetic judgment. Card's wish to keep faith with his adolescence has resulted in a wonderful celebration of early movies and their makers and stars, marred by somewhat thick-headed objections both to later movies and to all later critical treatment of the cinematic enterprise.

Card becomes lyrical describing the opulent movie palaces of his childhood, during the brief epoch when dressed-up audiences were politely ushered to their seats, before popcorn and soda vendors desecrated the grand lobbies and noisy, untidy throngs crowded the house. Before sound, Card suggests, movies really were believed to be a new art,

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and they were treated with a respect that the dream-factory productions of later decades rightly lost. In the big theaters, musical accompaniments were played by a full live orchestra or an organist; and it is clear, although Card does not talk about this, since his book is not a critical study, that early cinema had a certain similarity to opera as it used to be.

Early movie audiences, as Card describes them, seem like those for the repertory opera companies that existed in small cities all over Europe, when opera was meant to be generally entertaining and was not yet an expensive urban luxury with weighty social pretensions. Opera, too, provided beloved and magical stars, recurrent themes of passion and deception or comedy and tragedy, and the exercise of an intense suspension of disbelief during an evening of acutely unreal reality, swept onward by overwhelming music and unintelligible dialogue. Despite the obvious differences, there are suggestive connections, including the international character of both media. Without spoken dialogue, movie titles could be translated into any language; and now the opera, reclaimed for the general public, has supertitles offered in an arrangement rather similar to the one used for silent film.

Card doesn't tell us what he used for music when he first showed his own reels at home, and the specifics of background sound seem not to have interested him much, then or since, although he is careful to remind us of Lillian Gish's remark that "silent films were never silent." The details of the underscoring for all those early movies need another book—there may already be more than one. Card instead concentrates on explaining the visual effects used in the branch of early cinema first devoted to creative fictions, for which the invention of the close-up was the crowning achievement.

This artistic breakthrough he attributes to James Williamson in 1901, ten years before Griffith claimed to invent it, and he tells us that:

> Thanks to the pioneering of Muybridge, Méliès, the Lumières and Williamson, the motion picture entered the twentieth century equipped with all its basic properties: editing, close-up, multiple exposures, speed alterations, sound and dialogue, moving camera, large screens, even surrounding screens. The essentials were all there. The next fifty years would be devoted only to refinements.

These refinements, Card seems to believe, were fairly well-perfected by 1930, even including color and, alas, speech. After that, American film ceased to be an art and became a business, popcorn invaded the lobby, Card lost interest, and aesthetic and social respectability deserted the movies—except perhaps in Europe, Russia and Japan. But all the real groundwork had been done; and if movies have lately regained their status as important cultural expressions and are taken very seriously, they owe their elevated rank only to the original accomplishments of the pre-dialogue pioneers.

Modern movie-lovers, including lovers of the silents and the earliest sound dramas, may well be unaware of how many films were made in those very early days, how many hundreds and hundreds of movies of different kinds and qualities existed before 1930 that are now utterly gone. Before their conservation was even considered, and methods for it discovered, movies were born and died with prodigal rapidity, with the result that we are now dependent for our entire awareness of old cinema on a pitiful remnant. Card, his head still filled with the hundred thousand movies of his youth, is indignant at the modern reverence accorded to certain celebrated antiques, the landmark favorites that he often finds wretched compared to certain others lost or more obscure—especially when they are now screened at the wrong speed from horrible prints, with inadequate music or none.

He is particularly scathing about the universal worship of Griffith, whose *Intolerance* is still being called the greatest movie ever made. Card is at pains to describe the ways in which that film was a hopeless abortion and Griffith himself a vulgar sensibility, especially when compared to his European contemporaries. "Griffith's notion that he could stir bits and pieces ... together with shots of Protestants being slaughtered by Catholics, and Jesus Christ being crucified, all under a blanket indictment of 'intolerance,' was an error in both philosophy and aesthetics," Card writes.

Card is also chronically indignant at the presumption of anyone under 70 who teaches film courses dealing with the silent movies, and especially of those daring to formulate theories of film. He has no respect whatever for opinions about the silents put forward by persons who didn't see them when they came out, with their tinted stock or hand-tinted frames, their hand-cranked variable speeds, their organ or orchestra accompaniments. He claims a fresh effectiveness for those movies almost impossible to reproduce now, and espe-

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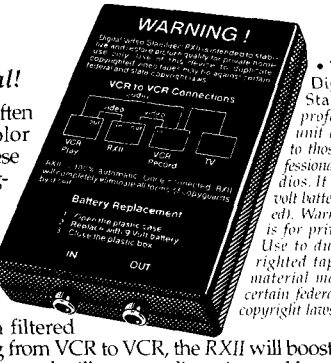

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cially difficult to appreciate after the intervening decades of internalized response to latter-day movie-making. In his own person, Card demonstrates the battle between opposing aesthetic camps—the engaged testimony of a contemporary eye-witness versus the detached judgment created by historical distance. How, Card might inquire, can we presume to teach courses in Michelangelo's frescoes, and to form theories about them, since we didn't see them in the sixteenth century?

But we do presume, and we should; and I believe Card really knows this about movies, too, despite his indignation. Still, his book is about love, that celebrated nexus of the ephemeral and the eternal that likes to defy augury, and theory too. So his emphasis is always on those acute responses that have produced his own love, on the specific forms of cinematic beauty, brilliance and pathos that called those responses up, and the persons and techniques that made them possible. He writes about actors, directors, producers, designers and cinematographers whom he has actually known and whose work he knew from its first appearance; and he offers himself as a surviving ideal spectator, still entranced and, as his title suggests, forever seduced.

And perhaps, after all, in the best position to judge, since nothing—not even the putting away of childish things—has ever dissipated the movies' pristine effect on him. Without such impact, films are nothing. They must have audiences, people caught in the dark who are thrilled and irreversibly changed, or perhaps uneasy and impatient—you have to feel the movie's force directly before you are allowed to be objectively intelligent about any of its components. Moreover, movies deteriorate especially if they are badly stored or many times reproduced.

Still, if later audiences don't get what was originally intended, they certainly get something. Their later judgments must perforce be based on what they do get; and their belated passion, too. One could say the same thing about Michelangelo. His frescoes were so materially changed over centuries that their optical impact itself gradually became a different thing, even apart from the issue of different eyes and shifting expectations. And yet we know that they could still strike home. We all bear witness to feeling the power of things we have only in ghostly versions that reach us across time's gulf. Painstaking restorations, like those in the Sistine Chapel or those lately made possible for old films by the devotion of Card and others, are wonderful acts of faith for which gratitude is due; but even without them, we get it. It may be tarnished, but it's a true thing.

Card possesses something, however, that nobody born later can ever have, and it is the experience of innovation, the revelatory newness of original screen marvels as they first appeared to eager eyes. He seems to have guarded this possession, and to have stayed away from anything produced more recently that might compromise its worth and his fidelity. Card describes some early movies that he says have more power than recent ones, and which were the very first to use the effects now doing the same work: flash-forward, for example, was used in 1914 in T. H. Ince's *The Gangsters and the Girl*, where two imagined future outcomes of a situation are filmed as if real, though neither is the one that eventually happens. He points out that this was used much later in Alf Sjøberg's *Miss Julie* of 1950; and I remember it in the form of false flashback in *Stage Fright*, also from the '50s, where lying testimony is enacted as if real, so we think it's true until we learn better. The same 1914 film first used other elements very familiar on modern screens: shoot-outs on rooftops, car chases, tension raised by clever camera angles, taut pacing achieved by masterly editing and naturalistic, unmelodramatic acting. Obviously, any modern moviegoer would love this film; but he could never see it as new, and Card still can.

Card's book serves as a reminder that the unique art of movies has its own unique art history, with a founding set of origins that has passed through its own unique developmental stages. The great early filmmakers had neither established academies nor private ateliers in which to transmit the secrets of their work to new film artists. Everybody learned by seeing and conceiving, trying and doing, hunting support and success; nobody taught and studied. Throughout early movie history, the influence of one filmmaker on another seems to have been haphazardly and unconsciously created rather than deliberately sought and acknowledged; and this situation is something that Card clearly likes. It makes his personal researches and collecting, and his later work of conservation and display, into one great creative endeavor. The early practitioners worked unselfconsciously; it is only the devoted, attentive lover of their films who can create their true history, and show and tell it to the world.

In this book, the movie-makers and the stars tell Card their stories, display their compelling qualities and gifts; but they have no sense of continuity and history, only a sense of themselves. Card loves them all (though he has his favorites), and he expounds his own ideas, not theirs, about their work and its relation to other movies. He's the one who can do it, after his faithful years of seeing and searching and comparing—the great surviving personalities are really of no help, other than for their continuing presence and glitter. But

The Other Mother

Because she is my mother, every night
she turns into Cinderella. In the wings
I watch. A dove balances on each shoulder.
Her hair tied with a scarf, she sweeps across
the stage, her broom, a branch, a courtly partner;
I smell the rosin and commit Prokofiev's
score to heart. It is Hamburg, 1965.
From the window of our hotel (once a palace),
Die Vier Jahreszeiten, a Christmas tree,
set in the white lake's heart, glistens.

We change hotels. Because, my mother says,
someone forgets to send the checks.
Our room becomes smaller, our hotels, motels,
rooming houses. A dancer helps me make
my father's gift (a box for cigarettes).
Cutting out three velvet hearts, I glue them
beneath the lid. My mother reaches home
at midnight. On a table I've arranged
her supper: dark bread, *hünchen*, peppermints.
She drapes a scarf across the lamp, reads mysteries.

Christmas morning. Evergreen in the air.
A small fir tree stands on the bedside table
alive with leopards, skunks, zebras, and bears.
Is this the way my mother feels as she
enters the room atop the crystal stairway,
the Court Ball at her feet like some rare gift,
a gift her mother had carefully placed
beside her bed, a tree in miniature
inhabited now by llamas, giraffes,
tigers, gazelles: a new kingdom to rule?

Elise Paschen

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those things, of course, are the core of movie-magic. Just as he wished to deflate the overblown reputation of Griffith, so Card wants to record his appreciation for the spellbinding cinematic excellence of works by Cecil B. DeMille, whose name is forever being taken in vain as a synonym for nothing but ridiculous excess.

Card is wonderfully eloquent about *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, made in 1919, of which he finally rented a print in 1933. This movie is still a touchstone, the one about which more has been written than any other. It was foremost among the first movies exhibited by the Modern Museum Film Library in 1935, and the first to be collected by Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française. Card himself only managed to buy it by going to Germany late in the '30s, on an express pilgrimage—never mind politics, apparently—to find an original print of *Caligari*, see and buy as many movies as possible and only operationally be a student at the University of Heidelberg. He was there, he tells us, in August 1939, when both he and his movie collection were "collected" by the Gestapo; but he got home safely. No details.

About *Caligari*, Card says it has all sorts of flaws and shortcomings, but was the first movie to "serve dramatic notice that film was a *graphic* art rather than a theatrical form or a branch of photography." This brings up, though again Card doesn't really discuss it, the positive value of soundless dialogue in originally creating the art of film. If people actually speak, we might as well be at a play; but if they only seem to speak, we are in a sort of fluid picture gallery, dependent for everything on our eyes, especially for the subjective interpretation of faces and bodies in all their minute incalculable motion. The close-up was a necessary element specifically in film without dialogue. It gave scope to that distinctively subtle form of acting known only in the movies, or maybe in paintings like the *Mona Lisa*. The face must do the speaking, and under close scrutiny. Card praises, as everyone does, the great silent actors who first understood how to stop their theatrical mugging and posturing and trust to the delicate intuitions of the moving camera—Gloria Swanson, Greta Garbo, Louise Brooks, Emil Jannings.

Brilliant color, too, would clearly have served as a distraction from the refinements of this new camera art, although Card points out that different tints of film made a great difference to the flavor of scenes, and frames were sometimes even hand-painted one-by-one, like Victorian fashion plates. *Caligari*, however, in its ground-breaking graphic message, would certainly have been compromised by any chromatic interference. Color photography and color cinematography altogether complicate the direct effects of camera work, since their results depend on printing processes that are themselves difficult and often questionable. "Naturalism" is made far more abstract with color film, and abstraction far more arbitrary. To establish the aesthetic credentials of the movie camera, the work of directly capturing and then printing the emotive effects of light and shadow in action had first to be controlled. Such work had to be made into supreme dramatic art by itself, before color and speech could safely be brought in. Spoken film acting certainly could not have flowered without its roots in magnificent silent-movie achievements; color cinematography could have no force without its foundation in pure chiaroscuro.

It is only lately, however, that movie-makers have become self-conscious and started to quote the past works of their art with evident deliberation. Sometimes they have even been scorned for this, as if it were not one of the great established modes in which all art is continued. To amplify Card's view that the art of movies has acquired nothing new in its later days, we would have to insist that it has acquired a sense of its own multiform past as a generative source. This means not just having past masters and past failures, but having discernible lines of tradition and filiation in all elements—cinematography, direction, acting, design, editing—which have been laid down and can be specifically followed, altered or challenged.

Since so much junk has always been made along with good things and real masterpieces, a critical faculty has also had to develop and to refine itself. Much of this has been done by the third and fourth generations of movie-lovers and movie-creators who have had to make do with whatever of the past has taken possession of them—and, of course, to deal with sound and color in all their registers. Wonderful childhood memories, just like Card's, have inspired Spielberg and many others, only from a later date. They are still inspiring the movie critics born since 1960 whose love can match Card's any time, even if it is not only for the silents, but also for what has never ceased to keep appearing and seducing us all ever since.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author most recently of *Sex and Suits* (Knopf).

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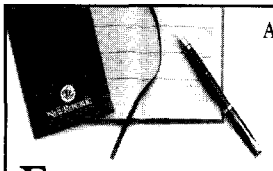
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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Some speculation

"IT'S SCARY," WAS THE MOST FREquent and dumbest response I heard to the recent Republican romperama. It came mainly from liberal friends, and it's another reason liberalism in its current form has just been whumped. Behind "it's scary" are two fatal assumptions. The first is that the right way to respond to political events is emotional; that the two sides in American politics can be divided into those who "feel" the right things and those who don't; and that those who "feel" the wrong things are either screwed-up or wicked or have just emerged from under a particularly clammy rock. You see this in Hillary Rodham Clinton's remark after her glorious health care fiasco that she will never forget "those faces" of the uninsured, as if the argument she so spectacularly lost were about who "cared" more. You see it in the president's pathological recourse to his own feelings, as if they amounted to a reason to support, rather than pity, him. And you see it in the visceral response to Gingrich, Armey, et al., which is a combination of self-righteousness and panic. Unfortunately, if you base your politics on emotion, you are hostage to anyone whose emotions are stronger than yours (i.e., Limbaugh listeners, Internet users, etc.). Which leaves us with a politics full of liberal sentimentalists and conservative fanatics. No wonder people are interested in a third party.

THE SECOND, RELATED ASSUMPtion is that politics is more about anathematizing than arguing. You'll find any number of liberals whose main line of attack on the new Republican leaders will be to describe them as bigots, rednecks, know-nothings, racists or religious nuts, and who regard that as an argument. (Since many liberals only fraternize with each other, of course, these sentiments have become ritualized as arguments.) Of course, it may be true, but it's a dismal strategy. Rather than engaging in real debate—Will cutting taxes help or hinder the economy? Do term limits make sense? Should kids be forced to pray in school?—liberals seek to smear their opponents in a riot of narcissistic posturing.

IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN, there were many such riots—the bid to stigmatize New Jersey talk-show host Bob Grant because he had incorrect views on race; or the hounding of Karen Burstein's opponents in New York because they dared bring up her open lesbianism. (Just why *shouldn't* her sexuality be a political issue? She asked gay people specifically to vote for her.) In both cases, rather than make an argument—South African blacks are not "savages," lesbians can make good attorneys general—liberals chose to moralize. Sometimes, it works—the smear-job against Stassinopoulos, for example, or the hysterical over-reaction to a recent, stupid *Spectator* piece about Jewish Hollywood—but as a broader tactic against the arguments of conservatives, it bombs. Among intellectuals, the campaign against *The Bell Curve* had a similar dynamic. *The New York Times* used its favorite code word, "dangerous," to describe Charles Murray. Bob Herbert engaged the book's data by describing them as "a genteel way of calling somebody a nigger." Even neo-liberals, such as Mickey Kaus, whose book, *The End of Equality*, echoes concerns uncannily close to Murray's, preferred distancing to debating; and others, such as Bob Wright, who believe genes are responsible for your taste in desserts found it more comfortable to refuse Murray even "an inch" of a platform than go through the motions of debating him. This is a sure sign of intellectual decadence. That *The Bell Curve* is now a best seller and the Republicans trounced their moralizing opponents is a cause not for panic but for relief. Many Americans, thankfully, are less scornful of arguments than many liberals.

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE, Michael Lewis directs a diatribe in defense of provincialism. My most recent experience of the phenomenon occurred in Britain, in a brief visit last month. In the couple of days I spent in London, I was escorted by the luscious and perky journalist Julie Burchill and her desirable, alien husband, Cosmo Landesman. I stayed at the Groucho Club, a soon-to-be-passé salon for the English mediocracy, loyally frequented by Julie and what she calls "her set." This comprises a few coke-crazed writers for the English magazine *The Modern Review* and a couple of oddballs, such as the swarthy, long-haired alternative comedian Robert Newman. (Yes, "alternative" is a delicate way of saying unfunny.) I spent one memorable night in Soho in an alcoholic daze (the Brits insist on pouring lethal booze down your throat and the food is so bad it always greets an empty stomach) being lectured about the latest obscure offerings of American popular culture. Admittedly, my sample was not exactly representative, but many of the young intellectuals in Britain seem to have seen *Pulp Fiction* at least five times, and endlessly regale you with quotes from it in the backs of cabs. These self-described "Tarantinis," for whom Schwarzenegger is not so much an icon as a text, rarely miss an episode of "Baywatch." They watch "Home Improvement" not with a view to catching a few mild laughs, or even with the ironic disdain of slumming American intellectuals, but *seriously*. In two generations, the Brits have displayed two distinct but undeniable sides of provincialism. The forty-somethings react to the American metropolis with contempt, expressing their sense of inferiority by finding reasons to hate the thing they secretly envy. The twentysomethings, rightly sensing that their elders are looking increasingly pathetic, have tried another tack: they love and know the place with a passion most Americans can scarcely muster. Personally, I tackled the provincial problem the old-fashioned way—by moving to the metropolis and becoming as American as I could. My peers, trapped in London, can only fetishize from a distance. Who is the least authentic, I leave to the metropolitans to judge.

MY OWN POST-PROVINCIAL PASSION of the moment is *Melrose Place*. I'm a recent, belated convert, dragged to the screen by gay friends who regard it as an essential accessory to homosexual existence. Now, alas, I'm completely hooked. The show is a completely unrealistic drama in which everyone has a perfect body, has slept with everyone else, has at least one personal tragedy per episode—early death, abducted child, murdered spouse, adulterous lover, etc.—and keeps his or her hair perfectly groomed throughout. The only truly boring characters are the gay ones, who are uniformly homely, out of the closet, faithful and slightly dim. In a recent show, the HIV-negative gay character decided to overcome his fear and become a devoted lover of someone HIV-positive. For a while, I found the entire show patronizing and silly. But then I realized the secret of its success. Straight people watch it as a reverse fantasy of their own lives; gay people watch it as a reverse fantasy of theirs.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Privileging Violence

There is a great deal of concern about school violence these days—and for good reason. Though some people maintain that the media greatly exaggerate the problem, those who work in schools in New York City or Chicago or Baltimore know better. And recent polls and surveys show that a majority of parents and other citizens agree with teachers about its seriousness. However, there is considerable confusion about how to deal with violence in the schools.

A high percentage of parents see the issue in matter-of-fact terms. Schools are places where kids are supposed to learn. Youngsters who consistently threaten the learning—and even safety—of others undoubtedly need help, but they have no business in the classroom.

But there are some well-meaning educators and policymakers to whom this is not self-evident. For them, the schools' most important mission is to "save" the violent and disruptive kids.

A report of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is a good example of this kind of thinking. "Schools Without Fear" says that schools should be "advocates for all children," but it focuses almost exclusively on the needs and "rights" of disruptive students.

The report tells us that schools should restructure themselves to accommodate violent and disruptive youngsters; they should provide special programs and curricula to teach teachers and other kids how to cope with violent students. Above all, schools should bend over backwards not to exclude violent or disruptive students or even, in most cases, put them out of class. The report acknowledges the value of alternative programs but says that students should be placed there only when other possibilities have been exhausted and with a view to returning them as quickly as possible to their regular classes. The basic formula is: We must not give up on these kids, no matter what.

This sounds very good—and it is quite right that turning violent and disruptive kids out onto the street will not help them; quite right that they need special programs and alternative facilities. But the kids who are forgotten in this picture are the vast majority of students, who don't make trouble. Why do we place so much value on youngsters who come to class with knives or guns and so little on their classmates who want to learn—or would give it a try if their classes were not disrupted by violence or fears of violence? What kind of message does it send when youngsters who are chronically disruptive get all the attention? And what does it mean for the future of public education?

What kind of message does it send when youngsters who are chronically disruptive get all the attention?

John Cole, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers, recently attended *Scholastic* magazine's "Annual Summit on Youth Violence," and what he heard led him to ask some of the same questions.

"The consistent theme," he writes in his report on the conference, "is that society's responsibility is to the perpetrators of violence, and that we should lavish our attention on those who commit the violence, in an effort to save those individuals, without regard to the effect that attention has on other, nonviolent members of society.

"The message," Cole continues, "came through time and time again. Those who commit crimes, abuse drugs or disrupt school are crying out for help, and we should rush to help them. My problem with this line of logic is that if young people learn that the way to obtain help is to strike out in acts of violence, that will become the normal method for seeking special help in our society. By rushing to help these young people, are we not encouraging others to emulate their behavior?"

Cole does not think we should abandon violent young people, but he thinks that absolving them from responsibility is ultimately destructive: "We need programs to work with them, and we should try to salvage as many as we can. However, if we assume that society is to blame for all their problems and responsible for developing solutions, we take away from them the responsibility for their own lives. Once a person assumes that he has lost control of his destiny, he has no difficulty in justifying any act because he feels no responsibility for the consequences."

Cole's conclusion: "If the philosophy espoused at this conference wins the debate over the role of schools in our society, public schools will become the place where we try to salvage lost lives, and private schools will become the place where people send well-behaved children who want an education."

Most ordinary parents and citizens understand this—it explains why a lot of people who have supported public education are turning, in frustration, to vouchers. And it's time the well-meaning people who believe that schools should put violent kids first realize that they are helping to destroy public education.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1994 by Albert Shanker.

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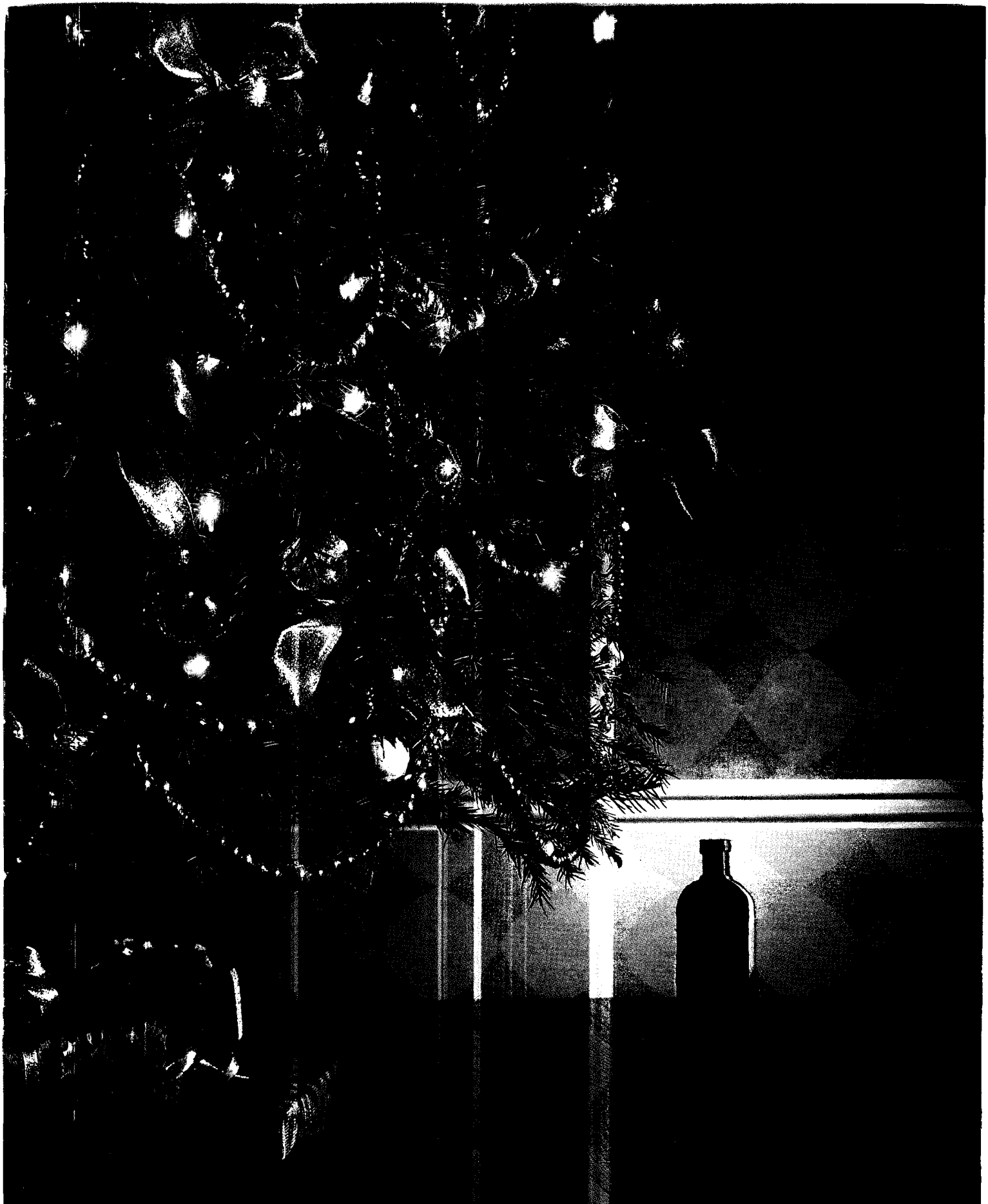

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